

Volume V, Issue 8  
April 2014

# VBR

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# Soft Skills In Demand

By Eileen Mattei

Although much attention has been directed at the lack of employees with technical skills, it is the people skills or soft skills – the ability to get along with co-workers and customers – that ultimately determine an individual’s suitability for most jobs.

“Most employers would rather hire someone with a positive attitude and fewer skills rather than a more skilled person with a bad attitude,” said Sara Van Wyk. As a Manpower branch manager, she is in a unique position to receive feedback from both employers and employees. “Having a positive attitude means trying to make the best of what life sends us. It means learning to turn even negative experiences into a chance to do something positive. To change your attitude, you need to make a conscious choice to replace negative messages with more positive ones.” There is power in giving and receiving posi-

tive messages.

While speaking at a Harlingen Chamber Lunch and Learn session, Van Wyk reminded attendees, “You are a leader wherever you go. Everything that you do, your people are watching. You need to be a positive magnet others can draw from.” She pointed out that some of us are cheerleaders for coworkers. “But when it comes to our own lives, we don’t see it.”

Self-respecting, ambitious workers ask themselves how they can become better in their roles. “Even if you feel you are going above and beyond, don’t ever not go for the goal. Shoot for it,” Van Wyk said. “You are doing something to better yourself. People who keep going are the people who find opportunities. It’s a choice you have to make.”

Examining the elements of your people skills is a good starting point for improving them. Van Wyk suggested asking yourself some pointed questions: Am I an effective communicator? Do I listen to others and correctly interpret

their words and behaviors? How do I rate my ability to get along with others? Do I take on responsibilities? Do I read books on self-improvement?

The even tougher test is to have your boss answer those same questions about you. How does she perceive your performance? Where do you have opportunities to improve as an employee or leader? Be prepared for honest answers.

Shifting gears slightly, Van Wyk discussed the major complaints she has heard from employers about their staff. It can be summed up by the three A’s: attendance, attire and attitude. Even in the presence of ability, these behaviors reveal if a person is a good fit for the company culture. From the staffing point of view, a serious worker should not be late or absent in the first six months of employment. “That is setting the tone for the future.”

Van Wyk reminded her audience that “Who you are at home is who you are at work.” Because of technology, work is intruding more off-hours just as home issues are encroaching on work time.” Striving for excellence and self-control is beneficial for both your home and work lives.



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Cover Photo: University Center at Texas State Technical College  
(Courtesy TSTC)

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Philosophy: We are a pro-business publication providing in-depth perspectives on business trends and creating a forum in which business leaders can exchange ideas and information affecting the local community's economy. Letters to the Editor: 300 words or less. E-mailed: [editorial@valleybusinessreport.com](mailto:editorial@valleybusinessreport.com) Please include your full name and city of residence.

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-Gabby Goodwin, Sam's Club Manager Harlingen



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# How Green is My Valley: Cool Moves

By Eileen Mattei

The sub-tropical RGV looks lushly green most of the year, but a new definition of green is becoming part of the landscape of palms and poincianas. The contemporary greening of the Valley encompasses environmentally sensitive practices that are becoming visible in green buildings and green walls and in the spreading use of native plants and water-wise irrigation systems. Companies involved in green construction, water conservation and ecotourism are finding opportunities for sustainable growth. Many green practices help trim operational costs while improve the community's quality of life.

## Green Buildings

Environmentally sound construction and design qualified **Quinta Mazatlán's** new Discovery Center for Silver LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification. The facility with a science laboratory, exhibit area and meeting space was inspired by

the original builders of Quinta Mazatlán, Jason and Marcia Matthews. "In the 1930s, before green was cool, they built an energy efficient house," said Colleen Hook, manager of the World Birding Center site. The couple used 10,000 adobe blocks made locally and recycled old newspaper plates to insulate the roof.

Today Quinta Mazatlán is a mansion with a mission: to show how people and nature can live beautifully together. "Our goal was a sustainable new building, and it actually ended up having the attributes of a home built in the pioneer days," Hook said. "Some of our greatest tools were the simplest ones. Over 50% of the new building has a wonderful patio that provides shade and serves as a visor. This can save up to 30% in cooling costs. The 'L' shape of the building allowed us to place it in the corner of the property, which meant more native landscaping space." In fact about 95% of the plants are native, therefore low maintenance and a source of food and shelter for Valley creatures.

"Many assume green buildings are difficult to build and very expensive, but actually you can choose from a huge 'green' tool box and use the simplest of

tools," Hook said. "We did not use solar panels, a green roof or install large metal cisterns, as they were not economical for our 3,500-square-foot building. We chose a design and tools that worked with our budget, served our programmatic goals, and would save us money in operational costs."

**Megamorphosis** is the Valley's only architectural firm where both principals are LEED AP certified architects. "LEED buildings are more expensive to build and design, but not to operate," said architect Meg Jorn. "Basically LEED is like an accounting system. There are many things you must do and document to achieve LEED certification" on silver, gold or platinum levels. The additional documentation of everything from the materials used and the construction techniques to the energy efficient heating, cooling and plumbing systems installed and the recycling of construction waste adds to the LEED point tally ... and to administrative costs.

Environmental design elements in-



Quinta Mazatlán's new Discovery Center, shown with Ruby Pond in the foreground, was designed and constructed using green practices that emphasize energy and water efficiency along with low environmental impact. It is a LEED Silver building suited for the local climate. (Courtesy)



Ricardo Garcia of Rainhunters inspects one of his company's green walls, a fiberglass panel which holds a full array of plants and has its own micro-watering system. (VBR)

clude techniques for capturing rain water and using as much recycled material as feasible. "LEED buildings are extremely well insulated so they are not gaining or losing heat. We have to build them tighter and better with the most efficient plumbing fixtures. Most of the lighting is LED," Jorn added. Public buildings and schools have been the first recipients of LEED certification in the Valley, as green building practices make their way south.

David McEver, who was the superintendent for **All Pro Contractors** on the Quinta Mazatlan project, agreed LEED certification makes a construction job more complex. "There is more paper work," he said of the two LEED projects the company has taken on. The contractors completed LEED training to understand how the certification system works through the U.S. Green Building Council. Recycling was an important factor in construction, from using crushed concrete in the slab to capturing and recycling rainwater from the roof to tracking the trash generated by the builders. Low voltage lights and toilets that use one-third the water of standard toilets garnered additional points under the LEED system. "That's what you're trying to do: get points."

den city of Cuernavaca, Garcia first encountered vertical garden walls in densely populated Mexico City. Captivated by the living art ecosystems, he recently introduced green walls to the Valley: vertical canvases of succulents that are simultaneously innovative landscapes with benefits.

Beyond the visual appeal of living green walls, Garcia cited studies that show the exterior vertical gardens reduce noise, dust and odors while lowering energy costs of the buildings they attach to by acting as insulation and reducing temperature fluctuations. Stress reduction has also been attributed to greenery as art. (In Mexico City, some walls have brand names and themes in their designs.) An added benefit: green walls get no graffiti.

Rainhunters installs fiberglass panels that have indentations they have filled with multiple plants. The customizable, exterior wall designs include an auto-timed, micro-drip irrigation system that keeps the plants thriving. "We use plant species that use less water and are suited to the region," Garcia explained. The plants can capture rainwater as well.

Garcia said the panel lifespan is approximately 25 years. Green walls increase the appeal of a property.

Botanist Mike Heep of **Heep's Nursery** has seen the interest in native plants grow as droughts and cold spells kill off tropical species. "There are a lot of native plant aficionados down here." Native plants also attract the region's abundant bird and butterfly populations. Heep has supplied major commercial

#### Green Plants

In 2012, after many customers of Ricardo Garcia's irrigation systems had asked him to include landscaping services as well, he changed the company name to **Rainhunters**. A native of the gar-



Installation of a green wall not only add health benefits but adds a beautiful, natural piece of decor to any space. (Courtesy Rainhunters)



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Rainhunters works to create sustainable beauty in every project through the use of local plants and irrigation systems. (Courtesy Rainhunters)



landscaping projects that decide to go native. “Natives survive better. You don’t have to battle to keep them going and growing.” He recommended fiddlewood, pigeon berry and potato tree for people who want to attract birds and native Turks’ cap in particular for hummingbirds. Rugged ground covers include frog fruit and snake herb.

The Valley’s nine World Birding Centers have tapped into the green-ecotourism trend. Marissa Oliva, manager of the Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, said the site has slowly become a model for native urban habitats. “We show what grows and how to care for it,” she said of the 10-year-old native landscaping. To-



A local backyard transformed into an outdoor oasis for the homeowners and wildlife to enjoy alike. (Courtesy Rainhunters)

day rare bird species are coming to the park and bring as many as 1,000 visitors in two months.

For more information, see [megamorphosisdesign.net](http://megamorphosisdesign.net), [rainhunters.com](http://rainhunters.com), [heepsnursery.com](http://heepsnursery.com), [quintamazatlan.com](http://quintamazatlan.com), [endinburgwbc.org](http://endinburgwbc.org) or contact All Pro Contractors at 971-9688.

Mike Heep’s nursery specializes in native plants, species like Mexican milkweed, red sage, heliotrope and Texas mountain laurel that survive drought and flood, border heat and cold snaps. (VBR)



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# Dismantling a Legend

By Eileen Mattei

The largest naval vessel ever scheduled for dismantling in the U.S. arrived at the Port of Brownsville in February. The ex-USS *Forrestal*, the Navy's first super aircraft carrier at 1,067 feet in length and 60,000 tons, was towed from Philadelphia to the All Star Metals dock on the Brownsville Ship Channel.

Nik Shah, president of All Star Metals, said the 18-month process of dismantling and recycling the towering flat top is another stage in the continuing growth of the business he started with family members in 2002. "Volume-wise, we will be the largest ship recycler in the country."

The days are long gone when ASM had only nine employees and Shah himself operated a crane. Through expansions and a merger in 2012 with SMS, a privately held multi-state recycling leader, ASM has become recognized as a world class dismantling and recycling facility and a licensed environmental remediation contractor. ASM, which dismantles several ships simultaneously, has allocated 200 employees to the *Forrestal* project and will probably hire additional workers.

The ex-USS *Forrestal* dwarfs tugs in the Brazos Santiago Pass. (Courtesy John Faulk, Frontera Media)



Seeing a historic aircraft carrier through her last days put the spotlight on ASM. Shah received countless letters and emails from sailors who had served on the *Forrestal*. "They taught me that the vessel was more than just a ship made of metal." Moved, Shah decided to stage two events for former crew members, their families and the public. With a 60-by-30-foot American flag waving on high and the *Forrestal* looming in the background at the Port of Brownsville, people arrived to honor the ship and heard a bagpiper playing "Taps" and "Amazing Grace."

"People have told me they appreciate the opportunity to say good bye," said Shah, who has heard countless stories of the vessel and her crew. "I think it is important to capture that data now. The best way to keep history alive is put your thoughts on paper. We can teach our children."

Shah and ASM are taking special care with the *Forrestal*, he has told sailors. "We will perform the task with all respect and honor. It will be part of our history again," the metal used perhaps to make more ships.

Jack Lawler was one of the 5,000 sailors on board the *Forrestal* (CVA-59) during her shakedown cruise in 1955, and therefore a plank owner, a naval tradition that entitles sailors to a part of the ship at the end of its days. Lawler was among the hundreds who journeyed to south Texas to say goodbye to a piece of their past. Looking up the massive but chewed-up looking ship at ASM's dock, he said, "It hurts to see her like this. She was a beautiful lady." The first carrier specifically

built for jets, the ship was nicknamed The FID for First in Defense. During its 38 years of catapulting and retrieving aircraft, the *Forrestal* recorded 376,500 arrested landings, including the largest plane ever landed on a carrier. It is remembered also for the tragic shipboard fire in



Kenneth Killmeyer, *Forrestal* association historian, reminded his audience at All Star Metals' dock of the proud history of the first super carrier. (Courtesy John Faulk, Frontera Media)



the Gulf of Tonkin which took 134 lives and injured 161 in 1967.

Last fall when ASM was the first licensed environmental remediation recycler to receive the necessary required facility security clearance, it won the contract to tow her from Philadelphia to Brownsville and there, dismantle the ship. "We had originally bid the job prior to the merger and were gearing up for it," Shah recalled. But the support it received from SMS did make taking the contract easier. The Navy, which retains ownership of the vessel, paid ASM one cent to dismantle the ship, figuring in the revenue the Texas company would receive from the sale of surplus metal. But first ASM had to pay millions to have the ship prepared and towed on its 17-day final voyage.

ASM's safety-conscious, five-step dismantling process begins with removing fixtures and identifying environmental hazards. Recycling a ship occurs from the inside out. Ferrous and non-ferrous metals are cut up and sold on the scrap metal market. Rail cars haul the steel to smelters in the U.S. and Mexico or to barges with similar destinations. Naval personnel on site monitor the process.

The Valley stands to gain more than just additional paychecks as ASM fulfills the contract. Cutting gases, diesel and other sup-

plies come from regional vendors.

Additionally, with the ex-Forrestal, All Star Metals entered into a five-year indefinite contract with the Navy. Shah said they expect to get other ves-

sels to dismantle.

For more information, see [allstarmetals.com](http://allstarmetals.com).



Two sailors from the Forrestal's first cruise are part of a select fellowship. (Courtesy John Faulk, Frontera Media)



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# Manufacturer Supplies Global Market

By Eileen Mattei

“It’s astonishing how many places use hydrogen,” said Sergio Martinez, president/CEO of Pan American Hydrogen, Inc. The engineer said his company designs, builds and installs hydrogen generating plants worldwide

for the petrochemical, automotive, stainless steel, electronics and plastics industries. They have installed plants in Asia, Europe, and North and South America.

Hydrogen typically functions as a component or raw material in these industries or as a tool or utility in their processes.

After 15 years at the Port of Brownsville, Pan American relocated to the Harlingen Industrial Park last year. “Three or four years ago, it became apparent we were running short of space,” said Stephen McLaughlin, who heads Pan American’s business development. “The

industrial demand for hydrogen is increasing as the rest of the world industrializes.” After looking all over the Valley, the manufacturers settled on the 45-acre tract with an 80,000-square-foot manufacturing space, eight times more than the company’s initial production area.

Much of the steel Pan American uses is purchased in Texas or Mexico, and most components, such as electrical controls, are American made. Pan American is fully integrated to build an entire plant in the Valley. Then the new plant, organized into approximately 30 modules plus the tanks, are shipped as individual components to the ultimate destination. Most of Pan American’s orders go by truck as oversized, permitted loads. One recent plant required more than 80 truckloads. “The place we have here is also strategically located to ship by barge or ocean freighter, either from the Port of Harlingen or the Port of Brownsville, or by rail across the U.S. or to any point in the world,” added Martinez.

Once on site, Pan American assembles the plant and starts it up. Designed to operate continuously, a hydrogen generation plant that produces one million standard cubic feet (scf) per day of 99.999% pure hydrogen can have a footprint of just sixty feet by ninety feet, Martinez explained. Pan American’s in-house process, chemical and electrical engineers specialize in designing small to mid-size plants that produce from one to 20 million scf. A plant’s components include pressure tanks, temperature controllers, piping, structural skins, heat exchanger tanks and the reactor vessels.

Martinez discussed a hydrogen plant they recently installed at a Florida re-refinery. Using an environmentally beneficial method, the re-refiner mixes hydrogen with 28 million gallons of used motor oil in a patented, proprietary process. This results in 24 million gallons of food grade white oil. “Hydrogen helps remove sulphur components from any oils, mineral or organic,” Martinez explained. “Hydrogen strips the sulphur and helps the fluid achieve the targeted specifications.”

Similarly, in the manufacturing of silicon wafers for computers, hydrogen removes atmospheric oxygen so the final product has no imperfections or contaminations. Another major use is in the production of nylon pellets which are the raw material for making everything from rugs to tires. “One of our plants is used in what is said to be the largest integrated nylon facility in the world,” McLaughlin said.

Pan American’s primary customers are new plants, but they do field a few requests from existing customers who need to expand.



Pan American Hydrogen CFO Jorge Rodarte, CEO Sergio Martinez and Stephen McLaughlin bracket a rendering of a recently installed hydrogen generating plant. (VBR)



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Martinez, who serves on the STEM advisory board at the University of Texas-Brownsville, said the Valley so far has supplied

a trained or trainable workforce. “We’re fortunate the marine shipbuilding industry is here, because basically what we require is skilled welders and drafts-

men.” Graduates of TSTC and STC programs and from UTB have joined the company. The workforce fluctuates with the projects, with a permanent staff numbering about 25. To fabricate one recent large plant, Pan American increased its workforce to 147.

Martinez is ready to work in collaboration with universities and colleges on apprenticeship and internship programs.

In addition to its core business, Pan American has the capacity to do related manufacturing. “We are prepared to support other businesses, like the power plants coming into the Valley, that need specialized equipment,” Martinez said. As an ASME code shop, Pan American can fabricate and certify high-pressure tanks, heat exchangers, separator tanks and other components for the oil and gas industry.

“The hydrogen plant business can fluctuate dramatically,” Martinez said, “but it looks poised for substantial growth.” Pan American’s owners are looking to catch the attention of new capital investors to more effectively capitalize on new opportunities in the industry and nurture company growth.



*Pan American Hydrogen built the components of this Mississippi hydrogen generating plant in the Rio Grande Valley and installed it on site. Footprint of the plant is approximately 60 feet by 90 feet. (Courtesy)*

*For more information, see [panent.com](http://panent.com).*

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# Best Restaurant Supply By John Sun

By Eileen Mattei

John Sun and head cashier Olga Ramirez check the stock of cutlery at Best Restaurant Supply. (VBR)

Despite his degree in mechanical engineering, John Sun has remained in the restaurant business for more than 40 years. Recognizing the unmet needs of restaurant owners like him, he branched out 10 years ago and opened McAllen's first locally owned restaurant equipment company, Best Restaurant Supply.

That's not the only change, of course, since 1974 when Sun was running his family's restaurant in Corpus Christi. In the Valley to buy citrus, he fell in love with South Padre Island. He opened the Tiki Restaurant there at a time when access to the island was via a swing bridge across the Laguna Madre.

Soon after La Plaza Mall opened in 1976, Sun launched a new restaurant, House of China, next to it. "Back then, McAllen was growing with people from Mexico and Winter Texans. But if you had a restaurant, you made a trip to Houston or Corpus every other month just to get supplies," he said. The Valley wasn't yet on the radar of major suppliers.

After years of slow service from distant suppliers of pans, plates and kitchen equipment, Sun got fed up. "I said, 'No. Let's



change that." Best Restaurant Supply was established

with a big showroom for commercial stainless steel sinks, buffet bars, stoves and refrigerators. Among the 6,000 items the supplier now carries are servers' aprons, spoons and huge pots.

"When we first opened, we tried to help everyone, including good friends," Sun recalled. The business initially lost a lot of money because of 'dreamers,' people who liked to cook but did not know how to run a restaurant, Sun said. He knows that being in the restaurant business is tough nationwide. "Half of all restaurants fail within as little as three months. Even experienced ones get in over their heads."

Sun attributes the failure rate to multiple factors. Among those are the combination of extraordinarily long hours (16 hours a day, seven days a week), the lack of a business plan and financial skills, and differing opinions within the operating family.

Yet Best Restaurant Supply learned from experience. "We learned and tightened credit," Sun said. "We still try to help. We have seen some nice young people open very successful businesses."

On the other hand, backed by his own years of restaurant experience, Sun has told several potential restaurateurs to rethink their plans. "We tell them some of them not to open. Sometimes we lose the sale." That is still a better position than selling equipment to people who default on their payments.

Hector Sanchez, who is Sun's IT consultant for ecommerce and a former manager of

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House of China, pointed out an added benefit for Best Restaurant Supply customers. “One of the things you’ll see with younger people is that Mr. Sun doesn’t just sell them equipment. He gives them free advice so they get a free restaurant consultant. Some people don’t want to listen, but the smart ones will. The others want to follow their dream, but they don’t know how to launch a property.”

Sanchez said Best’s customers are also cautioned about over-buying. “We know what they need to start with and do not try to oversell them. There’s a big difference between wants and needs for equipment. We have been through all this, so we can put ourselves in their shoes and stay within the budget. When business gets better, you upgrade.”

Sun and Sanchez commented on the influx of Mexican nationals with EB5 visas intent on opening a restaurant to fulfill the visa’s job creation/investment requirements. Every new shopping center has a tiny restaurant, although many of those will eventually fail due to the reasons listed above.

“So with all this, restaurants are booming all over this town,” Sun said. “People can walk in here today and open a restaurant tomorrow. McAllen has changed. Whatever you need for your restaurant, it’s right here now.”

Sun, who splits his time equally be-

tween House of China and Best Restaurant Supply and relies on good managers, said he is working smarter as he ages. “Physically you can’t work like you did before.” But he’s not considering retirement, saying it is hard to stop. “It’s not for the money. It’s not for the title. If you have to ask why, you don’t understand.”

In fact, rather than slowing down, Sun has been participating in restaurant equipment trade shows in Mexico City and Monterrey, because they don’t have restaurant suppliers like his, Sanchez said. “He is the only one I know looking to Mexico to expand.” Best has also branched into online sales and house brands.

For more, see [bestrs.com](http://bestrs.com)



John Sun, right, and Hector Sanchez have taken Best Restaurant Supply into ecommerce and developed house brands, along with operating the store in McAllen. (VBR)

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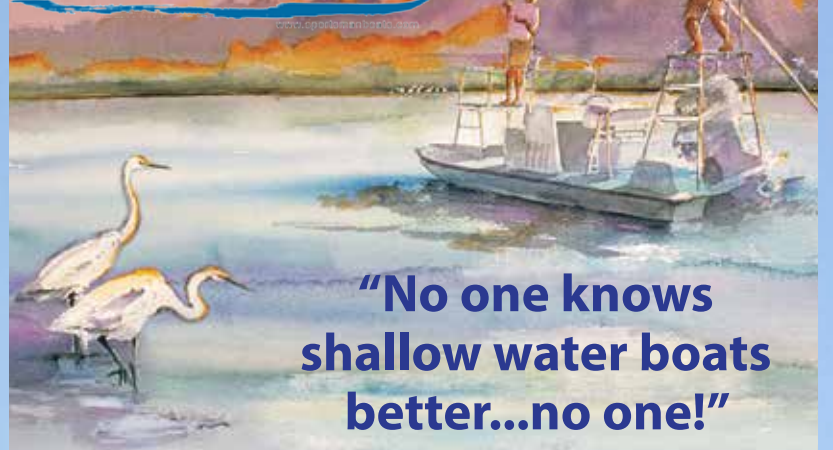
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# It's a Wrap

By Anita Westervelt

Mobile advertising has taken to the roads from Australia to Great Britain, New York to California. Now it has reached the streets in the Rio Grande Valley. Splashing color, design and information over the entire body of a vehicle is referred to as being fully wrapped. This latest trend in a long and creative history of advertising is quite possibly superseding billboards as the most effective way to promote business. Personalized designs, iconic cartoon figures and information partially covering a vehicle is – a wrap.

One expert Valley wrapper is Julian Rios, a graphic designer at his uncle's printing store, Chuy's Custom Sports in San Benito. "I didn't even know about car wraps until my uncle was interested in printing bumper stickers a few years ago," Rios said. "A salesman came to show us equipment. I'm always interested in whatever new stuff comes out."

Rios, who had taken auto body classes and auto collision repair at high school, was so enthusiastic about car wrap technology that the salesman offered him a free, \$1,200, three-day seminar in San Antonio. "The salesman said

Graphic designer Julian Rios shows off a fully wrapped car. (VBR)



the class would be good for me because it would tie in with my desires of working on cars and graphic design." When Rios came back from training, he used the wrap vinyl and laminate samples from class to wrap his brother's motorcycle. Since then, he has wrapped cars, big rig cabs, motorcycles and even a

coffin.

The technology involves printing on thin, conformable vinyl that was designed specifically for wrap advertising. Rios charges \$25 an hour for the design and \$14 per square foot to install a wrap. "I ask the client to come in

A promotional graphic for Mission, Texas. At the top, the word 'MISSION' is written in large, white, serif font on a dark blue background. Below it, the tagline 'INTERNATIONAL GATEWAY. ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES' is written in smaller white text. Underneath that, '★ TEXAS ★' is written in white. Below the text are several small images: a construction site, a modern building, a person working at a desk, and a sign for '3711 SAN GABRIEL MISSION, TEXAS'. At the bottom, there is a logo for 'MissionEDC' and the text 'TRANSPORTING BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY TO THE NEXT LEVEL', 'MISSION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION', and '800.707.1155 • 956.585.0040 • WWW.MISSIONEDC.COM'.



Julian Rios, Sal Mendoza and Chuy Aguilera oversee production at Chuy's Custom Sports. (VBR)



with a design idea and colors they want to use to keep the design cost lower," he said. The computer-generated design is converted to machine-compatible software so the printer can read it onto thin-ply, 54-inch-wide vinyl using eco-solvent ink.

"After printing, we run it through the laminator and trim it up," Rios said. "It's pretty failsafe." The vinyl is applied to a vehicle much like lining up wallpaper. Separate pieces are used at movable car parts like doors, trunk openings and fuel tank covers, which require matching the design with adjacent panels. The wrap material can be lifted and reapplied multiple times during the installation.

The process also is suitable for store front window advertisement and rear windows of vehicles. That vinyl is perforated, which allows viewing from inside a vehicle or building. Unlike paint, a wrap can be removed. The time involved in creating a mobile advertisement or personalized auto design depends on the complexity of the design and the surface being covered. Rios noted that his KIA advertising Chuy's Custom Sports took 18 hours to print, laminate and install, not including the roof. "We left the roof for the next day," he said.

Chuy's Custom Sports is a second career for owner Chuy Aguilera, a San Benito native. A former X-ray technician with the Texas Department of Health, Aguilera opened the printing shop in 1997 and currently has 15 employees. He got his nephews interested at an early age. "Julian began working for me at age 13. I would pay him \$5 a day. He is now assistant manager," Aguilera said. Julian's brother, Jaime Rios, has All Star Printing in Harlingen.

"The business really began to take off in 2005," Aguilera said, "and then my National Guard unit got deployed to Afghanistan." During Aguilera's two-year tour, his son, Juan, quit his teaching job at University of Texas at Brownsville to run the business.

"We will print just about anything," store manager Sal Mendoza said. "Our most popular product is printing school polo shirts. We have customers all up and down the Valley and ship to a lot of out-of-town clients. We do all the sports posters you see in area restaurants and businesses that various organizations use for fund raisers." Other popular products include political boards, banners, posters and bumper stickers. They also offer machine embroidery as well as a full range of printing products.

For more information, see [chuycustomsports.com](http://chuycustomsports.com).

# Fiscal Sanity

*Richard Fisher, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas president/CEO, recently gave this talk on "the gaping hole in the heart of our prosperity."*

If you remove the job-creating machine of Texas from the U.S. economy, the nation has experienced job destruction that has occurred over the past 12 years in the middle-income quartiles.

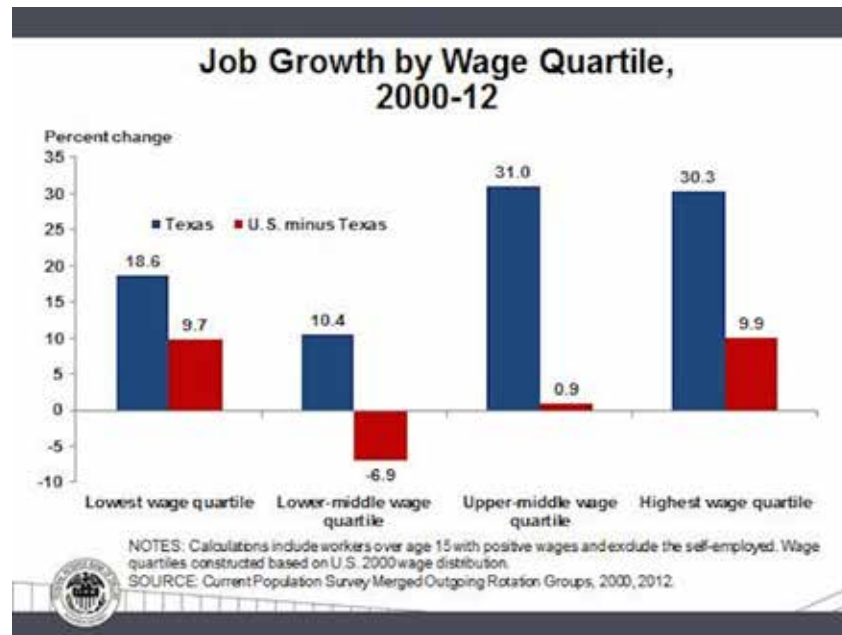
The most vital organ of our nation's economy -- the middle-income worker -- is being eviscerated. This is the pathology I worry most about.

Can my colleagues and I at the Fed cure this with monetary policy? Obviously, businesses cannot create jobs without the means for investing in job-creating expansion, so, yes, monetary policy is necessary to propel job creation.

But the store of bank reserves awaiting discharge into the econ-

omy through our banking system is vast, yet it lies fallow. They have ballooned from a pre-crisis level of \$43 billion to \$2.5 trillion.

There is plenty of money available for businesses to work with. Consider this: In fourth quarter 2007, the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) was \$14.7 trillion; at year-



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end 2013, it was estimated to be \$17.1 trillion. Had we continued on the path we were on before the crisis, real GDP would currently be roughly \$20 trillion in size. That's a third larger than it was in 2007. Yet the amount of money lying fallow in the banking system is 60 times greater now than it was at year-end 2007. One is hard pressed to argue that there is insufficient money available for businesses to put people back to work.

Now, bear in mind that we at the Fed only control the monetary base (cash plus bank reserves), not the velocity with which money is used.

Over the past six years, the monetary base has increased 340 percent, 10 times the rate at which the economy would have expanded in nominal terms had we not suffered the recent recession. One is hard pressed to argue that there is much efficacy derived from additional expansion of the Fed's balance sheet. This is why I've been such a strong proponent of dialing back our large-scale asset purchases.

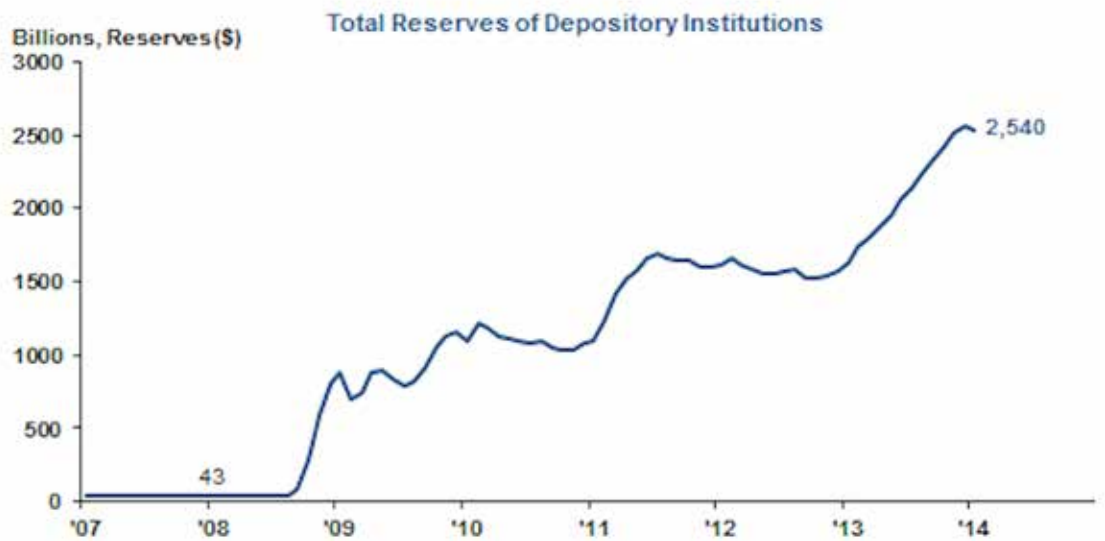
It is my firm belief that the fault in our economy lies not in monetary policy but in a feckless federal government that simply cannot get its fiscal and regulatory policy geared so as to encourage business to take the copious amount of money we at the Fed have created and put it

to work creating jobs and growing our economy. Fiscal policy is not only "not an ally of U.S. growth," it is its enemy. If the fiscal and regulatory authorities that you elect and put into office to craft taxes, spending and regulations do not focus their efforts on providing incentives for businesses to expand job-creating capital investment rather than bicker with each other for partisan purposes, our economy will continue to fall short and the middle-income worker will continue being victimized, no matter how much money the Fed prints.

If you wish to know who is at fault for hol-

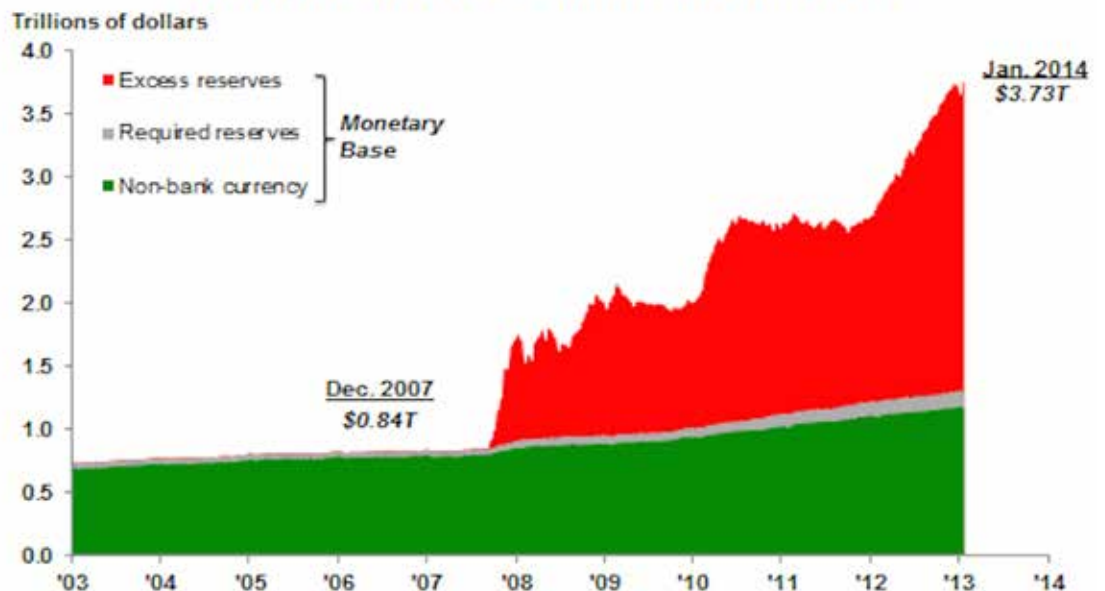
lowing out the welfare of middle-income workers and the American economy, kindly do not look at me or my colleagues at the Fed. Look at yourself in the mirror. We at the Fed are providing more than enough monetary accommodation. You elect our fiscal and regulatory policymakers. It is time for them to do their job, to ally themselves with us to achieve a fully employed, prosperous America. Only you, as voters, have the power to insist that they craft policies that are needed to restore American prosperity. Please do so.

## Bank Reserves Have Ballooned



SOURCES: Federal Reserve Board of Governors, H.3 release.

## Newly Created Money Mostly Sitting Fallow as Excess Reserves



SOURCES: Federal Reserve Board, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.

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# Collaboration or Competition?

By Susan LeMiles Holmes

Competition is an easy concept to understand. "I win; you lose." Collaboration, however, remains an elusive buzzword of "business enlightenment," as hard to capture as Tinker Bell. Technology companies race to get to the "collaboration market" first, manipulate their customers into accepting their concept and "monetize" the technology as soon as their site can support the distractions it brings to their customers. This is as perfect a definition of competition as I can imagine.



The good news is that now we have better tools to facilitate working together, not only person to person and team to team. We can now collaborate across time and space. There is even recognition of accidental collaboration. Remember the last time you tried to research something on the Net and encountered an article written by someone in the 18th century? This collaboration was independent of individual, time or space. The driver of the collaboration was the idea. Cool!

So, why don't people collaborate well -- misunderstood Darwinist principals, DNA conflicts? Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest doesn't merely mean the smartest and most aggressive. It means the most adaptable. As human beings, we cannot deny that helping others when in need is in our genes. Survival is in our genes too.

Typically, we spend 12 years in school being punished for copying another student's class notes (cheating). Our next experience with collaboration comes in college as an assignment in forced collaboration where motivated students are traditionally paired with unmotivated students to complete a project. My sons told me that what they learned was one or two students in the group do all the work and the ones who did not contribute (or even show up) got the same grade as the one that did the work. The collaboration's intended lesson was not what the experience communicated.

In spite of that bad start, people flock to the Web, using whatever tools are available to connect with peers, competitors and different knowledge banks (people/organizations) that might contribute to achieving goals. Employees are breaking free, getting out from behind company firewalls and collaborating.

So, again, why don't people collaborate well in the internal work place? If you ask why, they will tell you it's not because of having poor IT capabilities or lack of understanding

the concept. It's mostly because they have been incentivized not to collaborate. They are incentivized to compete, hoarding and protecting their knowledge ... hoarding their power. The perception is that the less knowledge they share, the more indispensable they become. They focus on performance bonuses and the memory of the last downsizing event.

Management hoards knowledge and power too. Instinctively, traditional hierarchies understand that the moment they truly collaborate with employees, power is gone and with it, overall control of the information to make business decisions. The organization is no longer a command and control operation where decisions are made for the workforce. Collaboration involves exposing individual personal skills and ability to lead, which are poignant pain points. True total enterprise collaboration is a big, big risk.

The solution to competition versus collaboration lands in the lap of the human resources department, the keeper of culture and compensation. HR professionals must understand that collaboration is not a just a buzz word, a tool or an outcome. It is a value system, a mindset that we choose to work by, a decision determined by whether we see ourselves as

the center of our universe, around which everything revolves or whether "we the people" are the universe ... an interdependent networked ecosystem.

How do we have our cake and eat it too? How do we reconcile the proven results of competition with the power of collaboration? How will we recognize and compensate the performance of the individual and reap the rewards of working together?

HR professionals drive culture, change and employee engagement. Those employees are the same people you courted and enticed over months of multiple interviews. Those employees are the ones for whom you designed the perfect perks, the ones who at one point were incredibly passionate, knowledgeable and truly committed to the mission of wanting to change the world for a better place through your business.

*Susan LeMiles Holmes is director of Career Services at Texas State Technical College and a published novelist. You can inquire about hiring TSTC graduates by emailing [susan.holmes@harlingen.tstc.edu](mailto:susan.holmes@harlingen.tstc.edu) or learn about Susan's novel, "Touch the Mayan Moon" at [www.susanlemiles.com](http://www.susanlemiles.com).*

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# Water For Today and Tomorrow

By Eileen Mattei

“All of us remember what it feels like to be in a drought,” said Carlos Rubenstein, chairman of the Texas Water Development Board. The problem has been that when it rains, many people tend to forget about water scarcity.

Speaking at the RGV Water Awareness Summit, Rubenstein, formerly the Rio Grande Watermaster, pointed out the long range impacts of ignoring the urgency of water shortages. “Shortage comes with a tremendous impact on users in the Valley.” He predicted that 50 years from now, if no action is taken on the water supply, the Valley alone will lose about \$2.9 billion per year, along with 63,000 jobs. Texas-wide, without water reforms and the accompanying growth, the state would have 1.4 million fewer jobs.

But far from being forgotten, Texas’ driest year ever, 2011, prompted 73% of the voters to approve taking \$2 billion from the state’s aptly named Rainy Day Fund to use for local water projects. “The most critical challenge is to recognize that our answers will come from different sources. There is no one single solution to the water issue,” Rubenstein said.

“We need to diversify where our water comes from.”

Texas agencies and regional boards are identifying regional water needs, and they need active participation to fully address the issues and determine the best strategies.

“Conservation is the cheapest water we will ever get,” Rubenstein said. Learning how to best use ... and not waste

Tom McLemore, special projects manager at Harlingen Irrigation District 1 (r) and Carlos Rubenstein, chairman of the Texas Water Development Board, spoke at the RGV Water Awareness Summit, which explored ways to maximize water resources. (VBR)



... is of primary importance. Other local responses

include brackish water desalination, direct reuse and working to confirm Mexico’s compliance with water treaties.

In the same vein, Tom McLemore, project manager for Harlingen Irrigation District 1, discussed water conservation efforts by the RGV agricultural community. “People pay attention to water only when there is too much or too little,” he said, echoing a summit theme. Currently 85% of the Rio Grande’s water is allocated to agriculture through 28 Valley irrigation districts with the balance set aside for municipal and industrial uses.

“Our irrigation systems are 100 years old and deserve attention. The best approach to ag water conservation is to increase the efficiency of irrigation district operations,” McLemore said. He cited a non-scientific survey that showed irrigation system losses ranged from 23-68% over a five year period due to inefficient delivery, particularly leaks. Wasted water totaled 911,000 acre-feet.

HID1 is leading local collaboration with the Texas Ag Water Efficiency project (AWE). It has demonstrated on-farm water technologies that optimize water use and let farmers grow more crops with reduced water costs.

In one project, 17 growers across the Valley purchased deeply discounted surge irrigation valves through AWE-RGV and increased their water efficiency. Texas A&M experts reported in December 2013 that, “Surge irriga-

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# Designing Space

By Anita Westervelt

tion in cotton is more profitable than furrow irrigation over the long term and can increase net cash farm income (NCFI) by as much as 56% per acre.”

One proven low water use strategy for citrus is narrow-border flood irrigation. “That has the potential to save 49,000 acre-feet a year,” McLemore said. Drip and micro-jet irrigation methods save water when on-site holding ponds are available. The problem of leaky irrigation canals is being addressed slowly as open canals are being replaced with underground pipeline (at a cost of \$250,000 per mile) or alternatively lining the canals. Automating water control gates is ongoing, at a cost around \$100,000 per gate structure.

“Irrigation strategies can produce 13% more water for less than the cost of municipal strategies,” McLemore added. With agriculture accounting for approximately 25% of Valley revenue, it is a sector that deserves more support in cutting costs and cutting wasted water.

On the consumer side, Roy Rodriguez, general manager of McAllen Public Utilities, talked about water conservation on the city, business and individual level. “We must have alternatives to Rio Grande. We are not creative enough ... when we have a crisis.” MPU, with an emphasis on safety, redundancy and conservation, gets water through four irrigation districts. It has a water education specialist working on outreach to adults and children, Fix-a-leak Week and providing free leak detection tabs for toilets. Water restrictions are tied to reservoir levels. The city uses escalating water rates as an incentive to keep consumption down. It sells treated effluent to a golf course and power plant and will be using the water to irrigate the landscaping at McAllen Convention Center. “We believe the technology is advanced enough” to do this with confidence, Rodriguez said. One of his goals is to have consistent water conservation plans in cities throughout region. The six million gallons per day of effluent flowing from McAllen into the Laguna Madre is another source of reusable water.

For more information, see [texasawe.org](http://texasawe.org), [hidcc1.org](http://hidcc1.org), [mcallen.net/mpu](http://mcallen.net/mpu), [twdb.texas.gov/groundwater](http://twdb.texas.gov/groundwater).

Steve Aune, owner of Nip ‘N Tuck Draperies, has found that the best way to showcase his wares is to live it. Prospective customers visiting his downtown Harlingen business are likely to get a tour of his living quarters above the store to see examples of his work. For the 16 windows in the third-floor, upscale loft, Aune designed a variety of window treatments that flow with the décor and display the versatility of his talent.

Swags, gathered treatments, balloon shades, tie-backs, puddled drapes and vertical blinds all compliment the 3,500-square-foot space. The customized decor leads through the tastefully defined formal sitting, entertainment and dining areas to the kitchen and private areas.

Design, style, fabric, color, length and quality all come into play when fitting out and creating and coordinating ambiance. “I custom make everything to fit the window and the décor,” Aune said. “You wouldn’t want puddled drapes in a room designed for recreation. I work with some of the best decorators around, friends and colleagues locally as well as in Austin. People who listen to my advice are happy. People who think they know better generally aren’t as happy.”

Aune learned the drapery trade from his grandmother who opened the business when the family moved to Harlingen from northern California in the 1970s. “She couldn’t find anyone to make drapes for her home, so she opened a drapery business.” Aune was taking final exams when a motorcycle accident nearly incapacitated him for most of a year. The accident halted his pursuit of a law degree and launched him in a different direction. During rehabilitation, he began working for his grandmother, installing draperies.

Drawing on his business degree, Aune quickly learned to figure estimates and operate the equipment. He purchased the business in 1986. Although his grandmother had rented the downtown storefront, Aune bought the building in 1989. An avid promoter of downtown loft living, he is a long-time board member of Harlingen’s Downtown Improvement District. “It’s a great place to live and do business,” Aune said. “The downtown district is known for its variety of antiques shops with a wide array of eclectic items.”

Aune’s 1928 building was originally an electric supply business. In 1932, the second



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and third floors were added as a warehouse. For that reason, the construction is super solid, according to Aune. "You could put 50 pool tables on the third floor, and the structure would still be rock solid." After renovations, Aune moved in in 1998. He has only one pool table.

For simplicity and durability, Aune advocates vertical blinds. "These were the cheapest blinds available in 1998," he said, indicating a set installed in his kitchen. "After 16 years, they look like the day they were put in. They don't wear out or get dusty."

To Aune, customer service is everything. "I will bend over backwards to make sure a customer is satisfied," Aune said. "To do a job well is my biggest satisfaction. I feel very good with what I do." The attitude has paid off. Until recently, his promotional

plan consisted of a phone book ad. "I resisted the technological wave for a long time, but word of mouth is still my best advertisement."

Another successful business attitude is his interaction with competitors. "I try to keep on a friendly basis with my competition to help them succeed, too. I don't want to succeed at the expense of my competition. I'll loan them tools, sample books, whatever they need. And I'm not afraid to share my secrets with customers."

Aune's business features products from companies that stand behind their warranties. He is an authorized dealer for Hunter Douglas and Norman Blinds. As well as custom work, he also does some repair work. "A company may sell a product with a lifetime warranty, but that means only for the original purchaser," Aune explained. He has frequently repaired Day Night shades popular in recreational vehicles. The blind consists of two different fabrics: one for filtering light, the other for room darkening. "Because of the design, the string will fray and eventually break. I discovered how to restring it with a thinner, solid core nylon string. I don't mind showing customers how to restring the shades."

Currently, Nip 'N Tuck operates with Aune and his long-time seamstress, Licha Camacho. "I'll hire more to do more," he said. "I have a number of friends to help with installations on the big jobs and in a pinch I can help out with the sewing." The shop has eight specialized machines, each with a different function, including a quilter, used for making custom bedspreads

Contact Nip 'N Tuck Draperies at [steveaune@att.net](mailto:steveaune@att.net) or 956-428-4331.



Downtown loft living gives Nip 'N Tuck Draperies owner Steve Aune space to showcase his wares. (VBR)

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Each sewing machine does a different function in the custom drapery business. (VBR)

# Pros and Cons of Buying a Franchise

By Janie Caballero

Are you considering buying a franchise as a way to launch a business? Before making this decision, it is crucial to understand exactly what it means to become a franchisee.

By definition, franchising is a business relationship in which a company (franchisor) with a proven, successful business model (franchise) allows an individual or business (franchisee) to use the franchise trademarks and offer products and services under the franchise name. The franchisor provides the franchisee with training, a turnkey operation, and on-going support in exchange for a franchise fee, royalties, and other fees, including marketing fees.

Below are other considerations to examine before entering into a franchise agreement:

## Franchise Advantages

- Name recognition
- Proven operational plan for running the business
- Initial support and on-going assistance, such as training
- Advertising and other existing marketing tools
- Greater probability of success due to track record with defined markets

## Franchise Disadvantages

- Discouragement to innovate
- Franchise fees and royalties
- Advertising fees
- Training fees, even if training is not needed
- Interest on financing
- Obligation to purchase supplies from franchisor
- Franchise success is not guaranteed

After examining these pros and cons, the potential franchisee should also reflect on the following:

- Brand name: How well known is the franchise? Does it have good or bad reputation?
- Franchisor track record: How long has the franchise been in existence?
- Demand: Is there enough demand in your area and will it grow?
- Requirements: Do you meet the franchisee requirements, such as owner equity, liquidity, net-worth, etc.?
- Abilities: Do you have the technical and or business skills needed to manage the franchise?
- Costs: What is the cost of establishing the franchise? Can you afford to buy it? When

will it become profitable?

- Competition: How much competition exists in your area? Is there a niche you can capture?
- Training and support: What kind and how much training is provided? Is it enough to meet your needs?

Additionally, it is imperative that the potential franchisee closely evaluate if the desired franchise is the “right fit” or a well-suited type of business for the franchisee. It is crucial to ask key questions related to franchise fees, sales benchmarks, operations, etc. The franchisor’s success is dependent on the success of the franchisees; hence, the franchisor has a vested interest in assisting the franchisee with any questions they may have before they sign any legal document. A potential franchisee should also take pro-active steps in speaking with existing or prior franchisees about their own relationships with the franchisor, the level and timeliness of assistance obtained, and any other issues that they may have experienced along the way.

Ultimately, do not feel overwhelmed or rushed into signing a franchise agreement or any documents pertaining to buying a franchise. It is recommended that legal advice be obtained to assist in reviewing and understanding these documents before they are signed. Additional resources are also avail-

able through franchise associations, franchise registries and business technical assistance centers.

Those considering buying a franchise can contact the UTPA Small Business Development Center, an organization that can assist potential and existing business owners with free, confidential business guidance. The UTPA SBDC also has franchising workshops and conferences, such as the upcoming “Domestic & International Franchising Summit,” available to the small business community. Keep connected to find out more on these opportunities at [www.utpa.edu/sbdc](http://www.utpa.edu/sbdc).

*Janie Caballero is a certified senior business advisor for the UTPA Small Business Development Center, where she provides confidential business guidance and training to potential and existing business owners. She holds a Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance and a Master of Business Administration from The University of Texas-Pan American. UTPA SBDC is a component of the Business Development & Innovation Group. For further information on BDI Group services, call (956) 665-7535.*

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# In the Spotlight



On March 5, PlainsCapital Bank & PrimeLending celebrated its North McAllen (10th & Trenton) branch with a McAllen Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting.

Top Left: Albert Chapa, PlainsCapital Bank market president; Alan B. White, chairman of the board of PlainsCapital Bank; Larry Gonzalez, PlainsCapital Bank market president; and J.J. Gomez, PlainsCapital Bank president. (VBR)



Top Right: Norma De La Rosa, PrimeLending mortgage loan officer; Isabel Mercado, PrimeLending mortgage loan officer; Rose E. Guerra, PrimeLending branch manager; Ken Whisler, PrimeLending vice president and area manager and Frank Velasco, PrimeLending production manager/loan officer. (VBR)



Below: The North American Advanced Manufacturing Research and Education Initiative at South Texas College celebrated the announcement of a \$500,000 grant from the Wagner-Peyser program administered through the Office of Texas Governor Rick Perry in March.

The grant will provide training to 675 individuals in areas including robotics, mechatronics, programmable logic controllers and other advanced topics. STC President Shirley A. Reed said, "Our success rests on our partnerships with manufacturers. When you are successful, we are successful."

The IAM Festo Technology and Automation Lab (shown here) at the STC Technology Campus enables students to learn the latest in robotic automation while applying science, technology and math. (VBR)



Above & Left: The Greater Mission Chamber of Commerce held its quarterly Buenas Tardes Luncheon at the Club at Cimarron on March 12. It was an opportunity for local business professionals to network and mingle. Atlas Electrical and Air Conditioning was the title sponsor for the event. (VBR)

For In The Spotlight consideration, submit your event photos to [info@valleybusinessreport.com](mailto:info@valleybusinessreport.com)





# In the Spotlight



Above: Many business leaders and members of the media gathered Feb. 27 at Lone Star National Bank's corporate offices on Nolana Ave. in McAllen to express the same overall message: When South Texas votes, South Texas wins economically.

Edna De Saro, 1st vice president and marketing director at Lone Star National Bank, shares with the crowd how important the business community and media partnerships are to AACT. (VBR)

Scott Friedman, center, owner of Pirate's Landing, Pier 19 and several Port Isabel properties, was honored by the School of Business at the University of Texas-Brownsville. Mark Knoll, dean of the business school, and UTB President Juliet Garcia, presented a plaque acknowledging the restaurateur as a 2014 Business Leader. (Courtesy UTB)

Below: McAllen EDC Marketing Director Adriana Trevino unveils the "Next 25-Year" plan to continue local economic growth through the combined efforts of the business community's input and McAllen EDC's leadership.



Thayne Klingler, a representative of Allegiant Airlines, helped inaugurate the airline's new direct flights to Los Angeles from McAllen Miller Airport in March. (Courtesy)

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# Leadership Equals Relationships

By Barbara Baggerly-Hinojosa, Ph.D.



“Leadership isn’t something you do to people. It’s something you do with them,” said popular leadership author Ken Blanchard. Effective leadership happens

when a relationship forms between the leader and the follower. Leaders build relationships with others in order to create trust, which allows for creativity and risk taking. How leaders actually build these relationships has changed over the years due to technology and the use of social media. However the relationships are built, strong leaders understand that it is important that the followers feel they know their leaders and can trust them.

Leadership describes the ability of one

person to inspire others. Research shows that leadership impacts company performance when the leader is seen by followers to be responsible and inspirational. In addition, leaders impact organizational performance when they are knowledgeable and can solve problems. Effective leaders are able to inspire confidence and support among the people who are needed to achieve the goals set by the organization. Leadership effectiveness refers to actually attaining the goals that were mutually agreed upon by the leader and the followers.

Leadership is a partnership that involves shared responsibility between the leaders and group members. Partnerships occur when the control shifts from an authoritarian way of leading to a more shared decision making approach to leading. In effective organizations, leadership often shifts between

leader and follower depending on the expertise needed at the moment. This allows leadership roles to be given to people who do not necessarily hold leadership titles.

For a valid partnership with shared responsibility to take place, the leader must understand and be able to empower others with the right to say no, develop joint accountability, and exercise absolute honesty. The leadership role within a team is seldom the responsibility of only one person because of the need

of expertise from others within the organization.

There are many ways a leader can empower others to take charge. Effective strategies involve listening to others. Listening is a skill that requires a great deal of practice. In today’s organi-



zations, there just does not seem to be much time for people to have authentic conversations where one person is talking and the other is actively listening. We all lead such hectic lives that we feel we don’t have time to really listen to others. But in the act of listening, we are sending a message to the speaker. By listening, the message that is given to the speaker is that he/she is valued and important. Why is that such a critical message? It builds the relationship that is needed for effective leadership to take place.

Do you want to be an effective leader? Follow these tips for developing the skills that help define a leader who influences and shares responsibility with others:

1. Listen, listen, listen
2. Empower your team with leadership skills
3. Create a trustful working environment
4. Be persistent

*Barbara Baggerly-Hinojosa is a full time professor with the Department of Leadership Studies in the School of Business at Our Lady of the Lake University (RGV Campus). She is an author, consultant and business coach. For more information on her publications and services, “like” Leadership Empowerment Group, LLC. on Facebook, follow @barbhinojosa on Twitter and visit [www.leadershipempowermentgroup.com](http://www.leadershipempowermentgroup.com).*



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