

CUIDANDO LO NUESTRO

Leadership by Example: Remembering Carolyn Schmies

Dear Friends,

We were all saddened to receive the news that Carolyn Schmies had passed on Dec. 23. It came as a shock to everyone who knew her. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family, friends and loved ones.

On Monday Carolyn called while on her way to San Antonio to discuss the topic for this week's Cuidando Lo Nuestro column. Since she was traveling there was a lot of static on the line. It was difficult to hear everything she said. We agreed that this week's column would be on the importance of volunteer commitment. Today's column is dedicated to Carolyn M. Schmies knowing that she is the perfect example of a committed and dynamic volunteer leader.

Volunteers are the secret to the success of any organization. They are vital to all non-profit agencies. Volunteers help staff community events, facilitate access to services and reduce the costs of providing programs for those in need. This holiday season, you might have seen volunteers serving meals at Bethany House on Thanksgiving or ringing bells for the Salvation Army during this Christmas season.

Volunteers are essential. They give of their personal time, provide leadership, and share their experiences or knowledge for the betterment of the community. Most volun-

teers are driven by a cause or inspired by something that has touched their life. It is that motivation that keeps them moving forward despite the challenges that might arise.

As president of United Way, Carolyn shared that her family was helped by a United Way agency when she lived in Indiana. Her daughter, Cesha Monique Brown had cerebral palsy. It was a United Way agency that helped them deal with many of the challenges of her illness. It was that help that began her years of support of the network. In Laredo, Carolyn lead the campaign while employed at General Motors, Packard Electric, Delphi and even at Laredo College. She put together committees and inspired faculty, staff and students to get involved and make a difference.

David Ovalle, owner of Livi's Mexique restaurant was a former student of hers. He joined the United Way board of directors this year and started the "First Friday" campaigns for United Way at his restaurant. David reached out to Ruiz Meat Market and they put together a barbeque chicken plate for sale only on the First Friday's of the month to help benefit the 20 organizations supported by United Way. David said, "Ms. Schmies encouraged us to be innovative, and motivated us by the example of her dynamic leadership."

Carolyn volunteered

and held leadership roles with other community organizations like Literacy Volunteers of Laredo, Women's City Club, Leadership Texas and the United Methodist Church. Carolyn Schmies was a lady of faith. She truly believed in helping those around her. Whether it was donating for a cause, volunteering as an active board member, coordinating a special event or silently offering prayers for someone in need. She was a true example of a dedicated volunteer. She would often tell me, "Peggy, I'm praying for the United Way."

Since taking office in January of 2025, Carolyn would call me daily to check in. She offered to help United Way by writing the Cuidando Lo Nuestro column. As her expertise was communications, it was a perfect match. Our Monday phone calls were the topic for the week and who could be the expert quoted in the article. She was amazing. She loved to share her life experiences and motivate people into action. She would prepare for every presentation and send me her speech to look over. She took her job very seriously. She wanted to make sure not to leave anything or anyone out. She always responded to phone calls, emails, messages or texts. She thanked everyone individually. She wanted people to know how grateful she was for their time, leader-

ship and support.

As the Executive Director of United Way, I can honestly say Carolyn was the dedicated board member we all dream of. She was always eager and ready to volunteer. Whether it was making a phone call, showing up at an event, selling tickets or bringing in a door prize. She was on top of it. She responded to every email or text message. She would say "THANK YOU" and "YOU ARE WELCOME" to every message. In fact, Carolyn responded on Monday to our special events chat, "see you at the meeting on Friday."

Carolyn strongly believed that if you volunteer for something it is important to follow through. It's so much more than having your name on a roster. It's about helping those around you and sharing God's love and blessing with others. Carolyn was a beautiful soul. She touched so many people's lives.

In October she celebrated her 77th birthday. Her husband, Kenneth Schmies, also a past president of United Way of Laredo took her on a first-class vacation to Los Cabos, Mexico. Some of her family members met up with them there. She was so happy about the trip and being able to spend quality time with her family. She kept saying it was the best birthday present.

Carolyn lived life to the fullest. She was a beacon

of light and hope for all those that she met. She will be greatly missed. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family and friends.

— Peggy Duncan

Mark Your Calendars Habitat for Humanity of Laredo: Electric Space Heaters

Habitat is currently asking the community to help them purchase electric space heaters for our neighbors in need. Visit their website at www.habitat-laredo.org to donate and help give the less fortunate a warm and safe place to cope with the winter weather.

Laredo Animal Protective Society (LAPS): Barks & Brews Label Contest

Visit www.petadopla-redo.org to learn more about how you can enter your dog for the competition. Only photos of dogs will be accepted. No people may be in the photo. Photos must feature your own dog or a dog you have permission to enter. The deadline to submit your photo is 8pm on Wednesday, Jan. 7.

A \$20 donation is required for each entry. You may enter more than one dog, but each dog required its own entry. LAPS reserves the right to decline any photo that does not meet contest standards.

Mental Health Virtual Seminar: Winter Blues & Your Mental Health

Everyone is invited to attend the virtual seminar featuring guest speaker:

Becky Diaz, BA, CHW. Participants will earn one knowledge contact hour. The event will be on Friday, Jan. 9 from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. For more information, please contact hmedellin@mrgbahec.org or call 956-712-0037.

Area Health Education Center (AHEC): Community Health Workers

AHEC will be having a Certification Training for Community Health Workers via Zoom on Tuesday, Jan. 13 at 6 p.m. (9 week course). If you would like to register or need additional information, please contact Vicky Morales at vmorales@mrgbahec.org or contact AHEC at 956-712-0037.

Laredo Crime Stoppers: 30th Annual Menudo Bowl XXX

Save the date! Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026. For more information on how to get involved, sponsor, participate, and volunteer reach out by calling 956-724-1876 or sending an email to info@laredocrimestoppers.org.

Children's Advocacy Center of Laredo

26th Annual Child Abuse Prevention & Awareness Conference Thursday, April 2 at TAMU

If you have an upcoming community event or information on a non-profit 501(c)(3) charitable organization you would like to share, please email me at 956cuidandolonuestro@gmail.com.



David Gomez Jr./Laredo Morning Times

Pallbearers carry the casket of J.J. Gomez Jr. for the Mass of Christian Burial on Dec. 29, 2025, outside San Martin de Porres Catholic Church.

GOMEZ

From page A1

before being promoted to department director in November 2019.

As director, Gomez led more than 200 employees responsible for 97 public parks, 11 recreation centers, dog parks, skate parks, pools, sports fields and courts throughout the city, operating under the department's motto, "We work hard so others can play."

City officials said Gomez's leadership helped strengthen public spaces and recreational programs that serve families across Laredo.

"JJ Gomez was a dedicated public servant whose leadership, passion and commitment to our community left a lasting impact on the city of Laredo," the city said in a statement.

Beyond entering city service, Gomez built one of the most successful coaching careers in Laredo history. At United High School, he spent 19 years as an assistant coach in multiple sports before becoming head baseball coach in 2007. Over 10 seasons, he compiled a 251-



Courtesy/City of Laredo

Laredo Parks and Recreation Director J.J. Gomez died on Tuesday, Dec. 23, 2025. He was 61.

88-5 record, led the Longhorns to the playoffs every year, won five district titles and guided the program to a state semifinal appearance in 2009.

In recognition of those achievements, Gomez was inducted into the Latin American International Sports Hall of Fame in 2017.

Beyond wins and titles,

colleagues and former players consistently described Gomez as a mentor whose humor, faith and encouragement shaped generations of students.

Even in grief, Sanchez told mourners that Gomez's influence would endure.

"Our lives will be different," he said, "perhaps

better because we have known him."

Gomez is preceded in death by his parents. He is survived by his wife, five children, a brother, two grandchildren and four nieces and nephews.

In observance of the funeral, the Parks and Recreation Department closed Monday morning.

Laredo, Webb County announce holiday closures for New Year's week

By Maria Ruiz
STAFF WRITER

The city of Laredo and Webb County announced schedule changes Monday as staff prepare to close offices in observance of the upcoming New Year.

City of Laredo

All administrative offices will close Wednesday and Thursday, the city announced last week. All services will resume normal operating hours Friday.

Certain operations such as garbage and recycling, landfill, El Metro Transit and the 3-1-1 Call Center will operate on a changed schedule as follows.

Regular recycling collection will occur Wednesday as scheduled, and there will be no garbage collection that day or Thursday.

Thursday's garbage route will be serviced Saturday. No branch or lawn clipping collection will take place on either day.

The city landfill will remain open Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., weather permitting, and will close Thursday.

El Metro Transit will run on a Sunday Service schedule Wednesday and close Thursday. All administrative services will be closed starting Wednesday.

The 3-1-1 Call Center will be closed Thursday.

All services will resume Friday.

Webb County

Webb County administrative offices will be closed in observance of New Year's from Dec. 31 to Jan. 2.

HEALTH

From page A1

federal investment," Gov. Greg Abbott said in a press release. "We will strengthen our rural hospitals, expand access to critical mental and physical health care, and help reduce chronic disease through wellness and nutrition initiatives."

The state's health care agency said it will use the funds to strengthen rural health care clinics in a variety of ways, including: creating wellness and nutrition programs to rural providers; educating and attracting health care professionals to work in rural areas; and modernizing resources and technology in rural centers.

More specifically, it plans to "add more than a thousand rural health care" positions with the additional funds.

For some Texas hospitals, the funding may be a lifeline.

Erin Clevenger, CEO of Memorial Medical Center in

Port Lavaca, southeast of Victoria, said in October to KERA that her hospital was on the brink of closing. "Every day is a battle to make sure we don't become one of those statistics," she said.

Fourteen rural hospitals in Texas closed in the last decade, according to a report from the Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform, and over half of the remaining hospitals — 82 facilities — were at risk of closing. And 21 hospitals were at "immediate risk of closing."

Rural hospitals have been pushed to cut their costliest services: labor and delivery services. Almost 60% of rural Texas hospitals don't deliver babies, leaving large swaths of the state without a nearby place to give birth.

Between 2010 and 2022, Texas lost a dozen rural obstetrics units, according to the University of Minnesota Rural Health Research Center, and one-fifth of those that remain are at risk of closing.

Dan Keemabill contributed to this story.