

CUIDANDO LO NUESTRO

Blood donors needed as supplies drop

Wow! It's hard to believe that we're already more than half way through the month of January. As they say, "The older we get, the faster time goes by." January highlights the awareness of National Blood Donor, National Glaucoma, Cervical Cancer and Thyroid, just to name a few. Its kind of appropriate that most of the highlights this month are for health screening. As enter the new year, we want to make healthy choices.

Today's focus is on National Blood Donor Month. Donating blood is like giving life, because you can actually save someone's life if they need blood. Many times, whether during needed surgery or because of a trauma-related accident, doctors may have to order a blood transfusion to save their patient's life. You just never know if you are going to need blood during a surgery or medical procedure.

The South Texas Blood & Tissue (STB&T) organization is a nonprofit charity that provides this service for the Laredo area. For about 51 years, they have been focused on the critical purpose of saving and improving lives.

"Since 1970, January has been designated as a month to honor and celebrate the incredible generosity of America's volunteer blood donors and to encourage others to donate," Roger Ruiz, Sr. Communications Specialist for the organization shared. "Our center provides blood, plasma, platelets, and other blood components to over 80 hospitals and clinics in 49 South Texas counties. We need about 600 donations every day in order to meet patient needs. We are currently averaging about 400 donations a day."

Mr. Ruiz also stated, "all blood types are needed,

particularly type O. The demand for it is especially high because type O-negative can be used for any patient in an emergency, and type O-positive is the most common for South Texas."

In order to support those in need, the South Texas Blood & Tissue agency conducts hundreds of mobile blood drives every year. In Laredo, blood drives have been held at Laredo Medical Center, KGNS, TAMU, the City of Laredo Police Department, Main Event and a couple of high schools. Last year, during January there were six blood drive locations hosted in Laredo. I'm sad to report that I could not find any locations listed for Laredo or Webb County this time around. I've actually been checking their website for the last few months.

During January, blood drives are encouraged to help fill the need for donations. Blood centers see drastic decreases in donations during the holidays, when frequent donors go on vacation and schools are out on break. The need for blood is constant to meet the ongoing needs of patients scheduled for surgery, those in need as part of their cancer treatments, newborns and their mothers, and many other patients. Albert Carmona, Business Development Manager for STB&T, advises everyone to be on the lookout for two blood drives that are scheduled in our area during the month of February. They are scheduled at Doctors Hospital and Laredo College.

"Rally your community to save lives - 50% of blood donations come from blood drives!" The STB&T website, SouthTexasBlood.org, provides information on how their team can help you select a date and location for your

drive. They will walk you through the process.

Things to consider:

- Assign a Blood Drive Coordinator (BDC) within your organization.

- Choose the time and location for your blood drive.

- Work with one of their account managers to coordinate the event.
- Check their Coordinator's Portal for more tips for success and access to tools.

- On the date of your drive, a trained phlebotomist will collect blood on site.

- Evaluate the results with your STB&T consultant.

- Schedule your next event to save more lives.

Blood drives can be hosted indoors or on a STB&T bus. To host a drive indoors, your facility should have a large, open room with space for at least six 6-foot tables, access to multiple 3-prong electrical outlets, restrooms and a temperature between 67 and 70 degrees. If you do not have the large open area, your drive can be hosted on a STB&T bus. All you need is to have at least eight available parking spaces to accommodate a bus and restrooms with hot and cold running water within 100 yards from the area.

If you are wondering who can donate blood, the STB&T website lists the following eligibility criteria from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). These guidelines are followed by all blood centers in the nation. Your eligibility is determined by your medications, travel, health conditions and lifestyle.

To donate blood or platelets, you must:

- Be at least 16 years old, weigh at least 120 pounds and present a parent signed consent form
- Be 17 years or older, and weigh at least 110

pounds

- Be in good general health
- Present a valid photo identification.

Some medications can prevent you from donating temporarily or permanently. Their website provides a list of medications to determine if you are eligible to donate blood or platelets. You can also call their Donor Eligibility department at 210-731-5555 at extension 2243, Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Their website also shares tips for "before you donate, when you donate, and after you donate". They encourage eating meals rich with iron the evening before you donate, drinking plenty of water, and to get a good night's sleep. When you arrive to give blood, you will need to fill out a health questionnaire. If you are able to donate, they will check your pulse, temperature, blood pressure and iron levels. If you pass the screening, you will be guided to an area to make your blood donation. After you donate, you are encouraged to rest about 10-15 minutes, have a snack or drink, avoid smoking for at least 30 minutes after donating, avoid caffeine or alcohol for the next 24-48 hours, and not skip any meals that day.

If you would like to schedule an appointment to make a blood donation at any of the upcoming locations by visiting SouthTexasBlood.org or call 210-731-5590. You might even consider hosting a blood drive at your location. Give them a call to coordinate.

Mark your calendars

Girl Scouts of Greater South Texas: Girl Scout Cookie Time!

Girl Scouts is excited to announce that the 2026 Girl Scout Cookie Program

officially kicked off this week. Laredo-area Girl Scouts should already have cookies in hand. Keep an eye out for their cookie booth sales at participating Wal-Mart's, Sam's Club and HEB's. You can also try their Cookie Locator at: <https://www.gsgst.org/en/cookies.html>. The 2026 Cookie Program will conclude on March 1.

Vita Volunteers: Catholic Charities & United Way of Laredo

Catholic Charities and United Way are partnering to provide Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) for the upcoming tax season. Appointments are available at Catholic Charities beginning Jan. 26. Please contact Edgar Martinez at Catholic Charities to make your appointment. 956-722-2443

Area Health Education Center (AHEC): Rally Up 988 suicide & crisis lifeline

To create awareness, AHEC will be having a *Rally Up* event on Friday, Jan. 30, from 11:30 a.m. to noon. They will be meeting on the corner of McPherson and Del Mar. You are invited to join them and wear your 988 T-shirt or the color purple to remind everyone that *You are not alone*. For more information, contact AHEC at 956-712-0037.

Combined Federal Campaign: Federal employee donations

Just a friendly reminder, the Office of Personnel Management has extended the CFC campaign deadline to Saturday, Jan. 31. All federal employees can go to CFC website to make their payroll deduction donations to charities. Visit givecfc.org.

UISD & AHEC: 9th annual Wind Symphony in concert

Everyone is invited to

come honor and celebrate our veterans on Sunday, Feb. 1, at 3 p.m. The event will be held at Laredo College's Guadalupe & Lilia Martinez Fine Arts Theater located at West End Washington St. The event begins at 3 p.m. and is free and open to all.

Children's Advocacy Center: 8th annual bowling tournament

Saturday, Feb. 7, at Jett Bowl North. Doors open at noon with both Professional & Amateur Divisions. For more information call 956-712-1840.

United Way of Laredo: 'Love is in the Air' Valentine's Day dance, sponsored by Falcon Bank

United Way of Laredo will be having a Valentine's Day Dinner & Dance Celebration. The event is sponsored by Falcon Bank and will be held at the Falcon Bank Event Center on Friday, Feb. 11, from 7-11 p.m. Music will be provided by Evolucion De Miguel Pastrana. Come enjoy the fun! For ticket information or table reservations, contact United Way at 956-723-913 or email at uwlaredo@unitedwaylaredo.org.

Imaginarium of South Texas: AEP Light up the Night

Join us for the AEP Light up the Night on Friday, Feb. 13 from 6-9 p.m. at the Imaginarium located the main campus of Laredo College (West End Washington Street) Building P-149. For more information, please call 956-728-0404.

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 956cuidandolonestro@gmail.com.

Peggy M. Duncan United Way of Laredo