OPINION

Laredo Morning Times
A Hearst Newspaper

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Laughter and dancing help South Texas families

Hope everyone is having a great Sunday! This week we had our monthly United Way agencies meeting. Every month, we get together at a different agency location to learn about their programs, services, successes, challenges, clients and needs. This month's meeting was at the Casa de Misericordia Education Center. We got to see the smiles on the children's faces as they enjoyed the summer camp at Casa.

The July meeting was co-hosted by the Salvation Army. During her presentation, Major Candee Elias shared photos of the children enjoying the Salvation Army summer camp in Dallas. Several of the members of the local group were able to travel with Major Elias to the one-week summer camp. Major Elias also noted that they were still looking for volunteer bell ringers for their Christmas in July kettle campaign. She also mentioned that the event would only be taking place on Fridays at Wal-Mart.

At the meeting, we were reminded of two upcoming events that I would like to highlight. Communities in Schools (CIS) will be having their 4th Annual Light the Way Dance Party on Saturday, Aug. 1, at the Casa Blanca Event Center located at 5064 E. Saunders. The event is "all for a brighter future" and will support scholarships and student success initiatives. Come dance the night away and enjoy the great music entertainment featuring the Jolly Ranchers, Push and DJ Slink-E. For more information, tickets, tables or sponsorship opportunities call CIS at 956-791-2199.

The other upcoming event that you definitely do not want to miss is the South Texas Food Bank's Laugh Out Hunger '26: An Evening of Laughter Making a Difference. Presented by H-E-B Hunger Relief, you can plan on an unforgettable evening of entertainment, community spirit and philanthropy benefiting hunger-relief efforts across South Texas. The event is scheduled for Friday, Aug. 14, at Sames Auto Arena, featuring nationally acclaimed comedian Steve Treviño, "America's Favorite Husband."

While Laugh Out Hunger '26 promises a night filled with laughter, its purpose is deeply meaningful. Proceeds from the event will help the South Texas Food Bank continue providing food assistance to thousands of children, families, seniors, and veterans throughout our eight-county service area, which includes Webb, Zapata, Jim Hogg, Val Verde, Starr, Maverick, Dimmit and Kinney counties.

With the support of organizations like the United Way of Laredo, each year, the South Texas Food Bank distributes more than 20 million pounds of food through a network of partner agencies, direct distributions, and specialized programs designed to address food insecurity in our communities. As inflation and rising living expenses continue to place additional strain on household budgets, the need for food assistance remains significant. Support from events such as Laugh Out Hunger plays a critical role in ensuring that nutritious food reaches our neighbors when they need it most.

Adding to the excitement this year is the Laugh Out Hunger Raffle, offering participants the opportunity to win an impressive collection of prizes while supporting a worthy cause. The grand prize is a 2026 Mercedes-Benz, along with additional prizes generously donated by community partners, including Skintology Spa, Joe Brand, Bricks & Tile, and Kendra Scott.

Raffle tickets are available for $100 each, and every ticket purchased helps support the South Texas Food Bank's mission of fighting hunger and feeding hope throughout South Texas. One hundred percent of the proceeds raised through the raffle will directly benefit the Food Bank's hunger-relief programs.

Community members are encouraged to join us for this special evening and become part of the effort to create a hunger-free South Texas. Whether through event sponsorships, table purchases, raffle participation, or individual attendance, every contribution helps make a lasting impact on the lives of local families. Together, we can share a night of laughter while helping ensure that no family in South Texas goes hungry.

For more information about Laugh Out Hunger '26, sponsorship opportunities, raffle tickets, or event details, please visit southtexasfoodbank.org/laugh or call the South Texas Food Bank at 956-726-3120.

Mark your calendars

AMERICAN RED CROSS: VOLUNTEERS URGENTLY NEEDED

The Red Cross is looking for volunteer leaders in our community to fill various capacities for Disaster Preparedness & Community Engagement. For more information, contact gabriel.castillo@redcross.org.

SOUTHWEST CENTER FOR PEDIATRIC ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH: HEALTHY HOMES WORKSHOP

Please join us for a training that will help you understand the connection between housing & health. The workshop takes a holistic approach to identify and resolve problems that threaten the health and well-being of residents, especially children. The workshop focuses on the eleven "Keep It" principles of a healthy home. The free presentation will be in both English & Spanish on Tuesday, July 21, at the Embassy Suites by Hilton located at 110 Calle Del Norte from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Register at https://elpasotuhsc.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6x5bffnUrGzZpae. For more information, call 915-215-8917 or email swcpeh@ttuhsc.edu.

SOUTH TEXAS BLOOD & TISSUE BLOOD DRIVE: LAREDO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Everyone is invited to come out and support the Laredo Chamber of Commerce Blood Drive on Wednesday, July 22, from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. It will be at the Chamber of Commerce office located at 5702 McPherson Suite 8B. Contact Monica Martinez at monica@laredochamber.com for more information or to schedule your appointment.

IMAGINARIUM OF SOUTH TEXAS: HEB FREE FAMILY FUN NIGHT

Join us for the HEB Free Family Fun Night every Friday on July 24 and 31 at the Imaginarium located on the main campus of Laredo College (West End Washington Street) Building P-149. There is free admission for everyone from 6-9 p.m. For more information, please call 956-728-0404.

LAREDO STROKE SUPPORT: CAREGIVERS MEETING

The caregivers meeting for stroke survivors is on the last Monday of every month (July 27). It is a place where caregivers share their unique challenges and learn that they are not alone. Healing extends beyond the survivor; this group is dedicated to helping caregivers find strength. The meetings are at 6 p.m. at San Martin de Porres Church. For more information, visit www.laredostrokesupport.org, email knowstroke956@gmail.com, or call 956-775-5774. You can also follow them on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

LAREDO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: WOMEN'S FORUM

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce invites you to the 2026 IBC Women's Forum an inspiring evening dedicated to leadership, empowerment and community impact. Stephanie Kendrick, president of La Quinta by Wyndham Hotels & Resorts will be the keynote speaker. The event will be on Thursday, July 30, at 5:30 p.m. at the IBC Annex Ballroom. For more information, contact Monica Martinez at 956-722-9895.

AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER (AHEC): RALLY UP 988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

To create awareness, AHEC will be having a Rally Up event on Friday, July 31, from 11:30 a.m.-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 y *ou are not alone*. For more information, contact AHEC at 956-712-0037.

COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS: 4TH ANNUAL LIGHT THE WAY DANCE PARTY

Are you ready to dance the night away? Call all your friends, and put on your best '80s attire! You can purchase individual tickets, but better yet the different sponsorship opportunities will get you additional food and beverage accommodations, treats and party favors. The event is on Saturday, Aug. 1, at the Casa Blanca Event Center. Call CIS for more information at 956-721-2199.

GATEWAY COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER: BACK TO SCHOOL HEALTH FAIR

On Saturday, Aug. 1, Gateway Health Center will be giving out free school supplies and offering dental screenings, blood pressure checks, and providing health education resources for those with and without insurance. School supplies (including clear backpacks) will be given out to children ages 4+ (while supplies last). The student must be present to receive supplies and services. The Health Fair will be from 9 a.m.-11 a.m. at their Central Clinic located at 1515 Pappas St.

MYKE'S PURPOSE: 5K RUN/WALK FOR A PURPOSE

The community is invited to participate in Myke's 5K run or walk to help support the awareness, education and prevention of substance abuse overdoses in Laredo. The event will be on Saturday, Aug. 1, at North Central Park. Pre-registration is $25 while on-site registration will be $35. For more information, contact Marina Media at 956-740-0633.

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

Peggy M. Duncan is the executive director of United Way of Laredo

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Christian principles and the Constitution

With regards to the eloquent letter to the editor written by Prof. Carlos Valle, which appeared in the July 126 edition of the Laredo Morning Times, I would like to add my own not-so-eloquent 2 cents worth.

For some reason, in certain segments of American society, it has become quite the norm to say that this nation "was founded on Christian principles/ideals/beliefs, etc." Well, not necessarily! Many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and framers of the U.S. Constitution were Deists and/or Freemasons.

In fact, Freemasons were already electing the leaders of their fraternity by popular vote when much of the world still clung to the idea that kings and queens ruled by "divine right."

Regarding the inclusion of biblical content in public school curricula: Even the pastor of my Christian denomination church has told me that the Holy Bible is not necessarily a "history book" or a "scientific manual." It's a "book of *faith*." And there is where we can start getting into diverging interpretations and opinions. Ponder this: During the American Civil War, both factions used Scripture to justify or condemn the enslavement of Black people.

Be that as it may, my main concern with this proposed "educational initiative" is how it will impact students and teachers whose belief system(s) might be Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, etc.

My fellow Americans, the U.S. Constitution, which we all profess to cherish, assuredly grants freedom *of* religion, but it also grants freedom *from* religion, if an individual so desires.

May wisdom and tolerance prevail!

Hector Senisais Soliz

LETTER

Wind Symphony says thank you

Congratulations to the UISD Wind Symphony for performing an outstanding Summer Patriotic Concert at Iglesia Cristiana Misericordia on Sunday, June 28.

The symphony, which consists of UISD, LISD, VMT, TAMIU, retired local and out-of-town music educators, and community members, offered a striking array of musical selections that included A Jubilant Overture, Shenandoah, La Giralda Pasodoble and a great selection of patriotic marches such as the Armed Forces Medley, the Washington Post, and Stars and Stripes Forever.

This magnificent concert would not be possible if not for the support of numerous individuals.

Enormous gratitude goes to Rev. Gilberto Velez for his generosity in allowing the Wind Symphony to share its talent with the Laredo community and for his most inspiring and empowering words during his invocation. Major words of gratitude go to Area Health Education Center Executive Director Dr. Julie Bazan, AHEC Academic Program Coordinators Hazel Medellin and Vicky Morales, and to the entire AHEC family for their never-ending support and their assistance before, during, and after the performance.

A huge thank-you to Ricardo and Alma Cavazos of RC Food Service & Produce for allowing us to use one of their trucks to transport our percussion equipment to and from the venue. Much gratitude is due to Ruben Villarreal, Laredo College public information officer/television & podcast director, for his magnificent contribution as master of ceremonies. As always, his warm disposition and captivating personality kept the audience engaged throughout the evening.

Thank you to Joshua A. Martinez, UISD Fine Arts Director, for his support. Thank you Wind Symphony "crew" members Alex Gutierrez, Jose Hernandez, David Caballero and Joe Lopez for the extra work of loading and unloading percussion equipment. Our committee members — Joe Lopez, Christopher Moore, Hiram Gonzales and Tomas Aguilar — have been the driving force behind our success, dedicating time, energy and expertise to make our goals a reality. Their commitment, leadership, and collaborative spirit have been instrumental in achieving our objectives and fostering a strong sense of community.

Thank you to Zulema Castro of H-E-B Guadalupe; Ricardo and Alma Cavazos of RC Food Service and Produce; Vicente Gonzalez of Los Pasteles Bakery; Laredo Morning News Publisher Bill Green; Ana Narvaez and Nancy de Anda of Women's City Club; Ike Epstein and Arthur Solis of Dr. Ike's Home Center; Kelly Cruz of Adams Printing; Javier Puerto of Sam's Club; Vere Ramoscollado and Bernardo Magallanes of Starbucks Coffee; Jose Santana and Iglesia Cristiana Misericordia, sound and stage engineers; and a very special thank-you to Roberto Gonzalez of Dannys/La Roca/La Carreta franchises for assisting in promoting this event.

Last, but certainly not least, thank you to Joanna Villarreal-McClinton, border patrol officer, for sharing her beautiful voice while she sang the National Anthem; thank you to the Laredo Explorer Post 2304 Honor Color Guard for the presentation of colors; and to Navy Commander Doug M. Alford for reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Sincerely,
Carlos Gil, Wind Symphony conductor and USAF veteran

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Laredo Morning Times does not publish anonymous letters.

Letters must include the writer's first and last names as well as a phone number to verify identity. The phone number is not published; it is used solely to verify identity and to clarify content, if necessary.

When responding to another's letter, writers should focus on the topic and not on the original writer themselves. No name-calling or gratuitous abuse is allowed. Letters are edited for style, grammar, length and civility. Also, letters longer than 1,000 words will not be accepted.

Please send letters to editorial@lmtonline.com attached in a word document or in the email itself. If you cannot send an email, mail to Letters to the Editor, 5711 McPherson Rd Suite 203A, Laredo, TX 78041.