

A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

Almost 30 years ago, something beautiful happened in the Rio Grande Valley. Our faith community and our business community came together to address an issue having a devastating impact on the Valley unemployment--one of the root causes of poverty.

Through a federal empowerment-zone initiative, the vision of Valley Interfaith and business leaders took shape and resulted in the creation of the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement. VIDA's mission and philosophy have remained steadfast--to enrich and enhance the lives of people across the Valley through education and workforce training. Earning certificates and degrees allows VIDA participants to become productive, self-sufficient members of our region, while at the same time providing a skilled workforce for existing businesses and a reason for new companies to establish a presence here.

The VIDA staff, under the direction of our new President and CEO Felida Villarreal and with the guidance and support of our Board, continues to incorporate a visionary approach to our mission. It is critical that we keep abreast of our current and projected workforce needs; maintain vital collaborative, educational, investment, workforce, and fundraising partners; and cultivate new partnerships. Educating and training in obsolete fields serves no purpose. We must constantly explore workforce gaps—as we currently see in the healthcare and construction industries—and then collaborate with our partners to address them.

Our founders knew identifying gaps, obtaining the necessary funding, and creating committed partnerships was only the beginning. They also understood the barriers our people often face when attempting to break the cycle of poverty—finances, life pressures, raising children, transportation, emotional support—so they developed VIDA's unique wraparound-support strategy to provide individual and group counseling for all of our participants. What a difference this priceless support makes. Still today, half of the VIDA Board consists of representatives of Valley Interfaith and half consists of representatives of businesses in the RGV.

Those who know me also know I am a sports fanatic, so allow me to share a quotation by legendary Chicago Bulls and LA Lakers coach Phil Jackson: The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team. Since opening its doors, VIDA has proven this over and over again.



TONY AGUIRRE JR. | MANAGING PARTNER | RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES, LLC | CITY OF MCALLEN COMMISSIONER





s I reflect on the 21-22 fiscal year, I am genuinely grateful to my Board of Directors and my entire team at VIDA for all of their support and dedication as we fulfill our mission. Strengthening existing partnerships, building new regional alliances, pursuing innovative student-recruitment strategies, and diversifying our fundraising campaigns represent only a few of our noteworthy accomplishments this year.

Our program continues to serve hundreds of students annually, helping them earn degrees and credentials in high-demand occupations, offering students a pathway toward selfsufficiency. Community support and partnerships are critical for VIDA's continued sustainability and growth as we enhance workforce development in our region. VIDA remains active in working alongside emerging industries, municipalities, and state policymakers to ensure we expand equitable educational opportunities among our residents in career tracks relevant to our economic climate. Through continued collaboration with our existing partners--as well as new ones--we will ensure VIDA's mission continues to move forward, building a highly skilled and highly competitive Rio Grande Valley workforce.

Our commitment to maximizing human capital potential among our underserved demographic through education and workforce training promotes economic mobility, ONE VIDA at a time! VIDA's impact in our community is truly priceless, breaking cycles of poverty and providing customized student support services for academic persistence, timely graduation, job placement, and job retention. At VIDA, we understand the numerous barriers and challenges prevalent while pursuing a postsecondary education reach far beyond tuition costs. For this reason, VIDA incorporates an evidencebased model focused on case management, career counseling, academic advisement, and guidance to help students overcome diverse obstacles, such as child care, language limitations, family responsibilities, and more.

I am proud of our achievements and the socioeconomic footprint we continue to grow across the RGV. I look forward to many exciting opportunities in the near future for increased collaboration, leading to education and workforce success.

Let us all continue to invest in our most valuable asset as a community and as a four-county region, our people—who, with adequate support and guidance, have the potential to create a brighter future here in the RGV.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2021-2022



TONY AGUIRRE Board Chairperson



MSGR. HEBERTO DIAZ Vice Chairperson



JOE HINOJOSA Treasurer



EDUARDO ANAYA



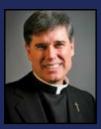
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david Oliveira



REYNALDO PEREZ



ABDIEL RAMIREZ



ROBLEDO



AL VILLARREAL

Widen the path of opportunities and continue to leave a powerful and positive legacy in this world.

~Luis Fonsi

VIDA GRADUATE FEATURED IN THE NEW YORK TIMES



nnabel Rodriguez, an intensive care nurse in the Rio Grande Valley, knows what it's like to spend years pursuing

a career. Ms. Rodriguez had dreamed of working in health care since she was a child, and looked up to her uncle, who was a nurse.

"He just inspired me to become a nurse and help others," said Ms. Rodriguez, 26.

In 2019, Ms. Rodriguez had already been accepted into a Licensed Practical Nursing Certificate program, but while attending orientation in December, a classmate mentioned the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA). VIDA works to support educational and professional development in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, and has a program designed specifically to address a shortage of health care providers in the area by supporting education among the underserved Latino population.

After applying, Ms. Rodriguez, who at the time was living with her family in a household of six

and whose collective family earnings fell below federal poverty guidelines, was assigned a counselor and received financial assistance to cover her tuition and school supplies. VIDA is a beneficiary of the Hispanic Federation, which is supported by The Neediest Cases Fund.

"I could meet with him and talk with him oneon-one about my concerns that I'm having," Ms. Rodriguez said about her counselor. "I really enjoyed that moral support from him."

Ms. Rodriguez graduated with her L.P.N. certificate in December 2020, and enrolled in an associate degree program in nursing the following May. She was once again accepted into VIDA, which provided her with a new counselor and a grant to cover her tuition and school supplies along with her Pell Grant. She graduated a year later, in May 2022, without debt, and then passed her board exams. In August she started working as a registered nurse at an acute longterm-care hospital center.

"I was always really scared to go back to school," Ms. Rodriguez said. But with the financial and emotional support she received through VIDA, Ms. Rodriguez was able to begin the career she has always wanted.

As for the advice she gives to aspiring health care providers? "It's OK to be afraid," Ms. Rodriguez said. "Just do it anyway." New Yourk Times published this article on its website in October 2022 by Emma Grillo



SUCCESS STORIES



By Chris Ardis

McAllen resident Rebecca Gutierrez always had career goals, but barricades kept getting in her way. "It was always financial challenges of either paying bills or paying for school," Gutierrez said. "I was not able to do both, at times." Gutierrez is one of six children who witnessed their parents perform the grueling labor only migrant farmworkers know. "My parents both worked hard for as long as I can remember and always told us that education was the key to a better future for ourselves and our families," she said. Gutierrez is a first-generation college student.

Gutierrez was unemployed, but the goal of becoming a nurse practitioner was never far from her mind. She then saw something on the STC website about Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement. "I want a better future, to be able to give back to my community while also educating myself to better provide for my family," Gutierrez said. "I chose the LVN program as a stepping stone and plan to advance to the RN program when I am done."

VIDA accepted Gutierrez in September 2021. Their help has made all the difference. "VIDA is helping me by paying for my entire school program, including tuition, books and uniforms," Gutierrez said. "I am focused on graduating with less stress and better odds in my favor with the financial help from VIDA."

She will graduate from the VN program in July. "I am very grateful for VIDA's help and will repay them by practicing in the RGV when I graduate, helping my community fill the void we have for health-care professionals," Gutierrez said. As she looks toward the future, she sees the far-reaching impacts of VIDA. "VIDA is important because it helps people in the Rio Grande Valley achieve their goals in education, which will, in turn, help the Valley become a more educated population," Gutierrez said. "And this will reduce poverty levels in the Valley, as well."



FINDING ANOTHER FAMILY IN VIDA By Chris Ardis

Pharr resident Vanessa Mendoza's parents did not have the opportunity to go to college and get their "dream careers." However, she said, they stressed the importance of college to their children. "My parents motivated me and my siblings to do well in school so we would be able to go to college to have a good job and a better future."

Mendoza worked at DHR Health as a registration representative for six years. The hospital setting matched her vision of a dream career. Determined to become a registered nurse, Mendoza enrolled in the Associate Degree Nursing program at STC. She soon encountered stumbling blocks. "I was struggling to pay for my college expenses since I do not qualify for financial aid," Mendoza said. Then, a co-worker at DHR Health told her about Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement. Mendoza applied to VIDA and was accepted in the fall of 2021. "VIDA is helping me stay motivated to do well in my classes," Mendoza said. "Aside from the program supporting me financially, the weekly meetings remind me of what I should be doing as far as coping with stress, time management, learning about loans and purchasing a home so I will be prepared in the future. These are things they don't get to teach you in school."

"VIDA is important because they are there for you," Mendoza said. "They are there to hear from you with whatever you are going through. VIDA has felt like a family, and my counselor is amazing to help us, guide us and motivate us to keep doing well."

With the support of VIDA and her loving mom, Mendoza expects to graduate in December. Earning her ADN qualifies her to sit for Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses. Earning a passing score on this exam will also earn Mendoza her dream title of RN. "Once I graduate, I will be able to start my career goal as a registered nurse and build my own future with my family," Mendoza said. Valley Business Report published this article on its website in March 2022.



INTRODUCING FELIDA VILLARREAL VIDA President & CEO

want to ensure that our unique student demographic in the Rio Grande Valley has an equal—and fair—opportunity for long-term career success.

Following the retirement of longtime leader Priscilla Dinn Alvarez, the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA) Board of Directors unanimously named McAllen native Felida Villarreal President and CEO of the organization effective April 1, 2022.

At the age of 20, Felida received her Bachelor of Business Administration with a major in accounting from the University of Texas-Pan American. She then went on to complete her Master of Accountancy at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. As a certified public accountant (CPA) with over eight years of financial management experience in both the public and private sector, Felida is proactively involved in keeping up to date with ever-changing accounting policy and regulations. She has a strong passion for--and dedication to higher-education attainment.

As an innovative millennial and an advocate for equitable educational opportunities, Felida has utilized her financial background to build effective resource-development strategies and to expand public-funding opportunities for VIDA within the educational nonprofit sector. This allows improved outcomes for underserved and non-traditional students pursuing post-secondary training programs by increasing student support services. These wraparound services simultaneously address the economic and social barriers to educational success through a dualcomponent approach, utilizing customized financial assistance combined with an intensive casemanagement model.

"I am extremely humbled and honored to have the opportunity to serve our organization in this expanded role," Felida said.

"I'VE GROWN TO REALLY CHERISH OUR SCOPE OF WORK AND OUR IMPACT IN THE COMMUNITY **THROUGH MY PREVIOUS ROLES** AT VIDA, INCLUDING DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND DEPUTY EXECUTIVE **DIRECTOR. I WANT TO ENSURE** THAT OUR UNIQUE STUDENT **DEMOGRAPHIC IN THE RIO GRANDE** VALLEY HAS AN EQUAL--AND FAIR--OPPORTUNITY FOR LONG-TERM **CAREER SUCCESS. OUR ULTIMATE GOAL IS NOT ENROLLMENT.** NOR GRADUATION. NOR JOB PLACEMENT. OUR ULTIMATE **GOAL IS A CAREER-PATHWAYS APPROACH IN TARGETED DEMAND OCCUPATIONS ALIGNED TO OUR ECONOMIC CLIMATE FOR COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT.** THIS IS WHAT LEADS TO SELF SUFFICIENCY AND CONTINUOUS **PROFESSIONAL GROWTH.**"

Felida emphasizes the significance of the organization in South Texas: "VIDA is a nationally recognized, evidence-based college-completion program that has been serving the RGV's Hidalgo, Cameron, Starr, and Willacy counties for nearly 27 years. Our professional counselors offer students an individualized profile assessment, an evaluation, career coaching, academic mentoring, personal and group counseling sessions, mental-health awareness, financial-literacy workshops, job-placement services, and more to achieve persistence and successful training completion. I am committed to building upon our solid foundation and reputation by continuing to promote economic mobility and human-capital investment through career pathways, proven to be an effective workforcedevelopment strategy for the overall advancement of our region."

YEAR IN REVIEW 2022 OUR GRADUATES





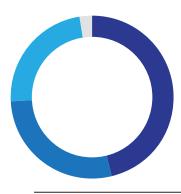
AVERAGE HOURLY WAGE FOR FY 2021-2022 GRADUATES PRE-VIDA POST-VIDA \$10.54 \$23.44

AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARY UPON GRADUATION: \$48,755

You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.

~ Maya Angelou





PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

PERCENTAGE WITH ONE CHILD OR MORE IN THE HOUSEHOLD	56%
PERCENTAGE WITH TWO CHILDREN OR MORE IN THE HOUSEHOLD	34%
PERCENTAGE SINGLE PARENTS	28%
PERCENTAGE VETERANS	3%



RACE/ETHNICITY

ASIAN	2	0.37%
AFRICAN AMERICAN	1	0.19%
HISPANIC	520	97.38%
PACIFIC ISLANDER	2	0.37%
WHITE	9	1.69%
TOTAL	534	100.00%

REVENUE:

FUNDRAISING: \$130,192 LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: \$940,000

STATE: \$679,054

FOUNDATIONS: \$561,667

MISCELLANEOUS: \$279,072

TOTAL REVENUE: \$2,589,985

EXPENSES:

PROGRAM SERVICES: \$1,979,416

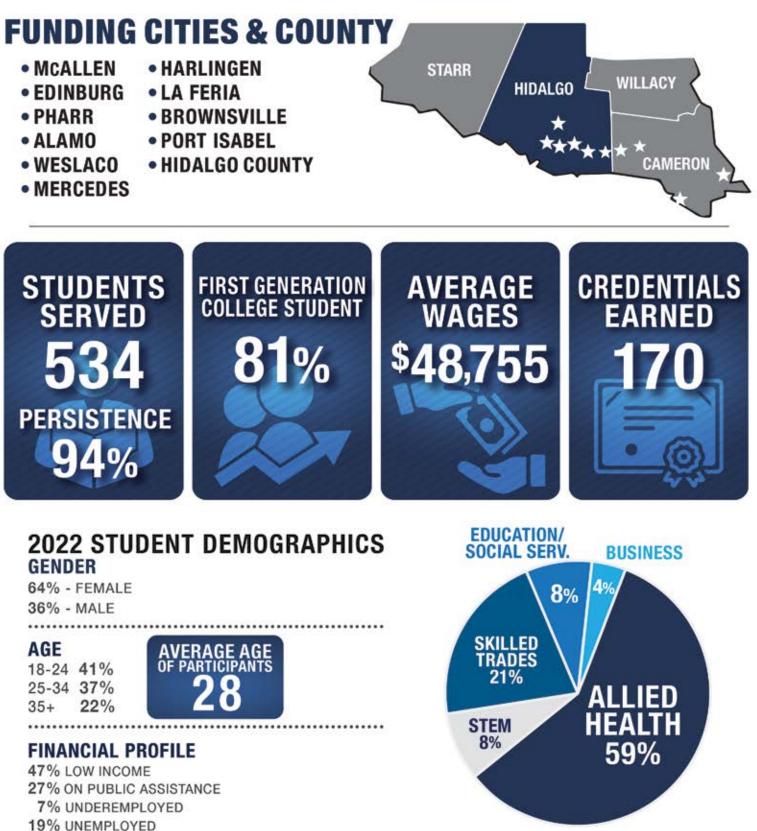
ADMINISTRATION: \$301,834

FUNDRAISING: \$40,736

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$2,321,986

CHANGE IN NET ASSETS TOTAL: \$267,999









BUILDING THE NURSING PIPELINE

ccording to Pamela Lauer, MPH, program director at the Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies, projections indicate Texas faces an unmet demand for nurses by 2032.

Lauer's "Nursing Shortages" research forecasts that the Rio Grande Valley will have a surplus of 1,098 full-time vocational nurses by 2032. However, her research reveals something entirely different when focusing on registered nurses in Texas in that same time frame: "The Rio Grande Valley is projected to have the greatest percentage of demand unmet at 27.2%, representing 6,274 FTEs."

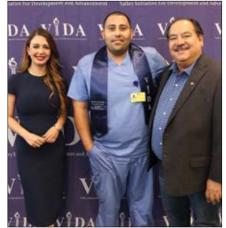
VIDA is working diligently to change the trajectory of this forecast.

"VIDA is a strong advocate for healthcare career pathways," said Felida Villarreal, VIDA's President and CEO. "More than 50% of VIDA participants, annually, pursue health-care careers." The VIDA staff and the organization's Board of Directors know they cannot address this dire need alone.

"Our health-care industry partners are critical, as they understand these gaps and the importance of building the talent pipeline," Villarreal said.

VIDA has embarked on a targeted plan to significantly decrease the unmet demand for RNs. With our committed partners and crucial funding, VIDA's future RNs will tell an entirely different story.





















CELEBRATING VIDA'S GOLDEN ACCOMPLISHMENTS

AND OUR PARTNERS OF THE YEAR

or nearly 27 years, the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement has provided customized financial assistance and intensive casemanagement services to over 6,000 students across the Rio Grande Valley, allowing them to pursue careers in high demand occupations. That calls for a celebration!

Thursday, September 29, 2022, VIDA hosted our second annual gala, *A Golden Affair*, at DoubleTree Suites by Hilton in McAllen. This theme embodied VIDA's golden accomplishments and our Partners of the Year.

Julian Alvarez III, former commissioner representing labor for the Texas Workforce Commission, delivered an inspiring keynote address. Guests enjoyed an elegant cocktail hour, dinner, music, a raffle, and a live auction with auctioneer Joe Brown.

Our partners are golden to us because they provide the invaluable resources we need to serve VIDA participants each and every day.

OUR 2022 PARTNERS OF THE YEAR:

VIDA 2022 Investment Partner of the Year - Pharr Economic Development Corporation

VIDA 2022 Community Partner of the Year - Weslaco Economic Development Corporation

VIDA 2022 Legacy Award – Retired Texas Senator Eddie Lucio Jr.

2022 VIDA Graduate Recognition for Outstanding Academic Achievement – Cristina Martinez, RN, and Cassandra Jimenez, RN

VIDA remains committed to providing exemplary student support services to economically disadvantaged residents, resulting in improved higher-education outcomes and workforce development success. Our unwavering focus centers on offering unemployed and underemployed individuals in the Rio Grande Valley an opportunity to achieve self-sufficiency and economic mobility through relevant workforce training.

A GOLDEN AFFAIR WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE GENEROSITY OF OUR SPONSORS:

DIAMOND SPONSOR

Conzepto Magazine Pharr EDC Socialife Magazine South Texas Health System

GOLD SPONSOR

Atlas, Hall & Rodriguez Blue Wave Express Car Wash Boggus Ford Chase Bank Falcon Bank IBC Bank Mego Afek Prime Healthcare South Texas College Spaw Glass Texas Regional Bank Valley Baptist Medical Center Valley Diabetes & Endocrinology Comprehensive Center

BRONZE SPONSOR

Frost Bank Lone Star National Bank RGV Focus Rio Grande Regional Hospital Rhodes Development Showery Insurance Texas Digestive Specialists The Monitor UTRGV Valley Business Report Weslaco EDC Yaqui Animal Rescue

Thank you to all of these sponsors, our guests, and everyone who supported our live auction and raffle with your generous donations. You are all precious gems!

SUCCESS STORIES

CHANCE ENCOUNTER LEADS TO CAREER SUCCESS By Chris Ardis

Back in seventh grade, Abdiel Ramirez found reading books about a variety of medical conditions fascinating, deciding then his destiny involved the health-care field. Then, in 11th grade, he read a book about the economy and future employment. After high school, Ramirez enrolled at Texas Southmost College in Brownsville, majoring in medical office management. At the time, he was living in Brownsville and working for \$8.25 per hour. While in the TSC Admissions Office, he noticed some papers on a chair and picked them up. He read about the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement. Ramirez applied to VIDA and gained acceptance.

"Interestingly," Ramirez said, "it was around the time when my father lost his employment. I was able to finish my studies due to VIDA's support." Ramirez said the weekly mentoring sessions made a difference for him, as well. After graduating from TSC with an associate degree, Ramirez felt driven to continue his education, enrolling in The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and declaring health information technology as his major. He has now added a bachelor's degree to his credentials.

The first in his family to graduate from college, Ramirez works as a customer-care coordinator for Specialty Care Rx and as a contracted speaker for Novo Nordisk, a global health-care company. "I have been able to see places all around the world that I never imagined I would be able to see," Ramirez said. "From the jungles and beaches in Costa Rica to the North Pole off of Norway, I have been there. Last year, Ramirez said, he earned just shy of six figures, a far cry from the \$8.25 an hour he was earning when he found those papers on the Admissions Office chair.

"VIDA is important because it gives a fighting chance to those who might not have the advantages others had growing up--for example, reliable transportation, a loving family and stable shelter," he said. "It allows students to have one less thing to worry about while they go about completing their education and eventually contributing back to the city that allowed them to thrive." *Valley Business Report published this article on its website in November 2022.*

FINDING A FOCUS FOR SUCCESS

By Chris Ardis

Savanah Arellano of San Benito had a job as a mental-health technician earning \$10 an hour. While Arellano knew she wanted to stay in the healthcare arena, she also knew she needed to earn a much better salary if she wanted to be self-sufficient and not struggle just to pay her bills. Because Arellano's parents divorced and her father passed away, she had seen those struggles firsthand.

Arellano enrolled in the Associate Degree Nursing program at South Texas College. She struggled tremendously during her first year and a half in the program. "I was working almost 40 hours a week and attending classes without sleep, not having enough time to study for exams and complete assignments, and my mental health was suffering as well," Arellano said. Then, a few of her STC classmates told her about VIDA. Arellano said. She applied for VIDA and gained acceptance.

The financial support that helped Arellano pay for tuition, books, uniforms, gas and other critical resources made a significant difference for her. But the value of the guidance and support she received from her VIDA counselor has proven to be incalculable. "VIDA also helped me by providing me with my counselor who provided me with unconditional, positive support, guidance and skills to continue with my education, no matter what barriers came my way," Arellano said. "I also found support from my VIDA peers during our counseling sessions. I became self-aware of my strength and coping skills to manage my stress and to study for my exams."

Arellano graduated in December 2021 with her ADN. She passed the NCLEX for RNs and accepted a job with Valley Baptist Medical Center. been provided aid for the Fall 2021 semester," said Arellano. "I am now able to serve my community as a registered nurse."

Valley Business Report published this article on its website in November 2022.

We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community...Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own. ~Cesar Chavez





DEVELOPING WELL-ROUNDED LEADERS

VIDA means "life" in Spanish. Each day, we have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our participants. We also have the opportunity to serve as role models of social responsibility.

By serving alongside our participants, we demonstrate that service to our community takes countless forms, also allowing us to

VIDA

YIDA

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demonstrate our gratitude to entities, institutions, corporations, and individuals whose generosity has kept VIDA's doors open for nearly 27 years.

> VIDA staff and participants volunteer in our community in a myriad of ways, sharing our time, our talents, and the joy serving others brings.

VIDA BOOSTS MOM'S NURSING DREAM TO DREAM TO REALITY By Chris Ardis

arning \$2.13 per hour plus tips as a server at Texas Roadhouse in Brownsville made it difficult for single mom Itssen Izaguirre to meet all of her financial obligations. This was especially true when she decided to pursue a career in nursing. Nursing had sparked her interest in middle school and Izaguirre felt the time had come to pursue it.

But between rent, utilities and all of her other

expenses, Izaguirre struggled to find the funds she needed to make her Texas Southmost College tuition payments. Then, one of her classmates, Valerie Perez, told her about VIDA, the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement. Izaguirre applied to VIDA and gained acceptance. "I knew that at the beginning of each semester, I would be stressed out about tuition payments," Izaguirre said. "Thankfully, VIDA gave me some relief. I had some freedom to not work as many hours in order to provide for my daughter and instead had time to focus on my studies."

While VIDA's financial assistance eased a heavy burden on Izaguirre, the nonprofit's wraparound services provided even more for this first-generation college student. "The weekly group meetings were really helpful to me," Izaguirre said, "especially during the first semester." That semester fell during COVID, a significant potential roadblock to success. "TSC was still offering classes remotely, leaving me cooped up at home every day with nothing but assignments, stress, and anxiety. Attending VIDA's group meetings was so relaxing!" During those meetings, Izaguirre said, she learned important skills like study habits. The meetings also gave her the opportunity to interact with other VIDA participants. "Those meetings kept me sane and focused," Izaguirre added.

With VIDA's financial assistance and direct support and her own determination to provide a better way of life for herself and her 3-year-old daughter, Izaguirre graduated at the end of last semester. She took and passed the National Council Licensure Examination, making her a licensed vocational nurse. She is currently in the process of applying for jobs. Valley Business Report published this article on its website in April 2022.

FUELING A FUTURE WITH VIDA By Chris Ardis

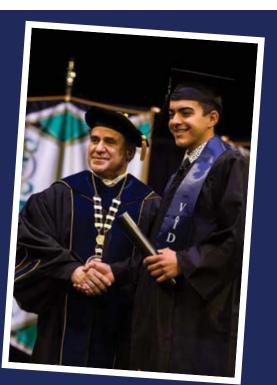
For Harlingen resident Sergio Rodriguez Jr., three holds great significance because he is a triplet, along with brothers Joshua and Matthew. Though he had built-in best friends, Rodriguez' life has had its heartbreaks. At a young age, the brothers lost their mom. "Everything I do," Rodriguez said, "is to make her proud."

Working at Stefano's Brooklyn Pizza, one of Harlingen's most popular eateries, Rodriguez was earning \$9 an hour, but he had aspirations of having a career that would allow him to support himself and have extra income. Then a friend told him about VIDA. Rodriguez applied and earned acceptance into VIDA, choosing to pursue a Diesel Technology degree at South Texas College. degree at South Texas College.

"With gas prices being the way they are," Rodriguez said, "the commute from Harlingen to McAllen every day started to take a toll." In addition to helping with tuition and books, VIDA provides assistance with expenses like transportation. VIDA also helped Rodriguez purchase the tools he needed for the program, relieving the financial burdens and stress that would otherwise have prevented him from fulfilling his aspirations. VIDA provided its wraparound services to Rodriguez throughout the two-year diesel-technology program.

Rodriguez graduated in May, surely making his mother proud of her first-generation college graduate. Upon graduating, he accepted a Diesel Tech II position with Parker Automotive in Harlingen earning \$25 per hour, nearly three times what he earned before completing his degree. Now, Rodriguez has a new job, a new truck, and more. "A lot of doors have opened, and I'm only starting," he said.

Valley Business Report published this article on its website in August 2022.





WHY BABASA BABAS

ugust 27, 2022, the *Rio Grande Guardian* posted a story online about Hidalgo County Judge Richard Cortez' newest initiative, the Hidalgo County Prosperity Task Force.

In the story, reporters Mario Muñoz and Steve Taylor quoted Judge Cortez as he explained his rationale: "As you know, we have a disproportionate percentage of people in poverty in Hidalgo County when you compare it to the percentage of the United States as a whole or the percentage of Texas as a whole," Cortez is quoted as saying.

The Hidalgo County Prosperity Task Force organized sub-committees to develop a strategic plan for addressing the root causes of poverty.

JUDGE CORTEZ OUTLINED THREE GOALS FOR THIS TASK FORCE:

1) To identify how the County can serve those living in poverty, from financial literacy programs to health and wellness education, primarily the overwhelming rate of obesity and diabetes among its residents.

2) Creating human capital by providing vocational training and higher education, removing any obstacles that prevent completion.

3) Creating more jobs through relationships with local businesses and by welcoming targeted new businesses to the region.

VIDA's President and CEO, Felida Villarreal, and the VIDA Board Chairman, Tony Aguirre, are serving on this Task Force. Our mission closely aligns with Prosperity Task Force goals, thus enabling us to provide an invaluable historical perspective, as well as a current look into how lives can be changed through building partnerships, developing a targeted workforce, and providing social, emotional, and financial support throughout the process.

As you look at the statistics for the region we serve, you will clearly see "Why VIDA?"

OCT. 2021 UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

6.3 %	Texas
8.1 %	Cameron County
9.0%	Hidalgo County
14.8 %	Starr County

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

\$69.717	Texas
\$43,057	Cameron County
\$44,666	Hidalgo County
\$33,334	Starr County

PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS WITH BACHELOR'S DEGREE

21.2%	Texas
19.0%	Cameron County
19.5%	Hidalgo County
12.3%	Starr County

POVERTY RATE

14.2%	Texas
24.4%	Cameron County
23.9%	Hidalgo County
25.2%	Starr County

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

TESTIMONIALS



MATTHEW S. HEBBARD

VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT, SOUTH TEXAS COLLEGE

"VIDA is a valuable and longstanding partner for our support for students. We enjoy a collaborative relationship with VIDA, as they are experts at providing case-management services and basic-needs, wrap-around support services for students. Well known regionally and nationally for their success, VIDA's mission aligns perfectly with the College mission of student success. VIDA expands our capacity to support the most at-risk student populations through key touch points throughout the student lifecycle. This year, we were proud to partner with VIDA and were awarded a grant by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to expand our partnership and increase the number of students served."



JULIAN ALVAREZ III

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT & DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, LONE STAR NATIONAL BANK

"VIDA is a great partner in workforce development, helping to ensure that Texans are job ready. Training low income, unemployed, and underemployed residents and connecting them to high-skilled, high-wage jobs is vital to the economic stability and growth of the Rio Grande Valley."



RICHARD CORTEZ

COUNTY JUDGE, HIDALGO COUNTY

"I wish to congratulate VIDA for another successful year of operation. Year after year, VIDA has helped hundreds of individuals create human capital, which in turn has earned them the right to receive higher compensation. VIDA continues to give many individuals access to opportunity. Research shows that certain policies and investments not only directly benefit those in need but also reduce the cost to government and, ultimately, the taxpayer. Keep up the good work, VIDA."



RAMIRO GARZA

MAYOR, CITY OF EDINBURG

"VIDA's commitment to ensuring our residents have the tools and education they need to find a high-skilled, high-wage job benefits the entire Rio Grande Valley. The programs they offer have led to job retention in various industries. Their sessions on resume preparation, the development of interview skills, and more work to create a self-sufficient workforce. The positive impact they have had makes the City of Edinburg a proud supporter of all they do."



REBECA LOPEZ

DIRECTOR, RGV FOCUS

"RGV FOCUS is a collective impact initiative created in collaboration with Educate Texas and Communities Foundation of Texas. Founded in 2012, our mission is to transform college readiness, access, and success in the four counties of the Rio Grande Valley. One of our most valuable partners is VIDA. VIDA's participants are advised and supported through career pathways and education/training that meet local employer demands. Most importantly, VIDA's intensive case management and social supports greatly facilitate student success. These outcomes are directly aligned to the mission of RGV FOCUS, and we are so proud to support--and to be in partnership with--VIDA as it changes the lives of students and improves the economic vitality of the Rio Grande Valley."





JOIN STUDENTS ON THEIR JOURNEY VIDA'S COMMERCIAL ELECTRICIAN PROGRAM SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASES EARNING POTENTIAL

Students practice on their rigid pipe bending skills using a manual pipe bender as part of the Level 2 commercial electrician training. Pipe bending is an essential skill on both the commercial and industrial side of the electrical industry, and electricians who master this skill will significantly increase their earning potential.

Students are completing their Level 2 commercial electrician apprenticeship training through the Rio Grande Valley Laredo Electrical Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee, VIDA's nonprofit industry training partner. Students are also learning about industrial switches, transformers, pilot devices, magnetic and manual motor starters, heat tracing, capacitors, motor controls, and various troubleshooting skills.

These students have already been working in the field for eight months, applying what they learned during their four months of Level 1 training while earning a competitive wage. They have now returned for the next level in their apprenticeship (Level 2), as they continue to make their way toward taking the Texas Journeyman Electrician License. An apprentice is required to have 8000 hours of experience before qualifying to challenge the state exam. VIDA understands the importance of facilitating a career-path-driven training program, such as this electrician apprenticeship training. Despite needing four years of experience before taking the exam, this valuable credential allows apprentices to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and competency in the industry while enhancing their employability and earning potential.

All of these students were either unemployed or working in low-skill jobs with little to no career mobility potential. With most of them having families to support, they are now well on their way to establishing a bright and long-term career as professional electricians, providing them with significant economic advancement. A licensed journeyman will earn over \$25 an hour in the Rio Grande Valley.

"The program VIDA has established with the RGV-LE-JATC is a very practical program," said Sid Ramos, VIDA's Director of Workforce & Economic Development.

"YOU DON'T NEED EXPERIENCE--JUST THE LOVE FOR THE TRADE. ANYONE WITH AN INTEREST IN WORKING WITH HIS OR HER HANDS, PROBLEM SOLVING, AND TAKING PRECAUTIONS FOR SAFETY CONTROLS, WHO ALSO DOESN'T MIND WEARING BLUE JEANS AND A HARD

HAT TO WORK, SHOULD CONSIDER **THIS CAREER** PATH. In as little as four months of training, any individual can launch a career as an electrician. This program provides career diversity and continuous career growth for workforce development success!"

VIDA PARTNERS 2022 WE COULDN'T DO WHAT WE DO WITHOUT YOU!

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

Chase Bank **Child Care Management Services ConZepto Magazine** Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Keep McAllen Beautiful The Monitor Nexstar Media, Inc. **RGV Focus RGV Hispanic Chamber of Commerce** Rio Grande Guardian SOCIALIFE Magazine South Texas Health System **Texas Border Magazine** Valley Business Report Workforce Solutions (WFS)

EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS

Cameron County Education Initiative (CCEI) RGV Laredo Electrical – Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee South Texas College (STC) Texas Southmost College (TSC) Texas State Technical College (TSTC) The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)

FUNDRAISING PARTNERS

Atlas, Hall & Rodríguez, LLP Bert Ogden Auto Group Blue Wave Express Car Wash **Boaaus Ford** Chase Bank Falcon Bank Frost Bank **IBC Bank** Lone Star National Bank Meao Afek **Prime Healthcare Rhodes** Development **Rio Grande Regional Hospital** Showery Insurance South Texas Health System SpawGlass **Texas Digestive Specialists** Texas Regional Bank Yaqui Animal Rescue Valley Baptist Health System Valley Diabetes & Endocrinology Comprehensive Center

INVESTMENT PARTNERS

Adult Career Education (ACE) Grant Program Alamo EDC AT&T Foundation Brownsville Foundation for Health & Education City of Alamo **City of Mercedes** City of Port Isabel Development Corporation of McAllen, Inc. (DCMI) Edinburg EDC Greater Brownsville Incentives Corporation (GBIC) Harlingen EDC **Hidalgo County** La Feria EDC The Meadows Foundation Mercedes EDC The Moody Foundation Pharr EDC **RGV Focus Texas Mutual Insurance Texas Rural Communities** Texas Talent Connection Grant Program - Wagner Peyser Texas Workforce Commission - Self Sufficiency Fund (TWC-SSF) The Trull Foundation United Way of Southern Cameron County Valley Baptist Legacy Foundation Weslaco EDC

Great vision without great people is irrelevant. ~Jim Collins, Author of Good to Great

THANK YOU TO THESE EMPLOYERS WHO HIRED OUR FY 2021-2022 VIDA GRADUATES!

Abri at Edinburg Accenture Ageless Living Home Health All About Kids Home Health All Generations Health Care. Inc. Alterman AnswerOne Aveanna Healthcare Baptist Medical Center - San Antonio **BCFS Health and Human Services** BGS Naraindas, Inc. Brownsville Nursing and Rehabilitation Center Calidad Home Health **Carrizales-Rucker Detention Center** City of Brownsville City of Edinburg Colair, Inc. CSL Plasma **DHR Health Doggett Freightliner**

El Rancho Grande Adult Day Care Jaime Escalante Middle School Frontline Home Solutions, LLC Gallegos Electric, Inc. GC and J Cooling and Heating, LLC Global Electric Go-Go Kids Rehab Clinic Michael Gonzalez Law Firm Happy Valley PHC **Hidalgo County** Johnson Controls **Knapp Medical Center** Lamson Institute Little School House Learning Center **McAllen Heart Hospital** McAllen Independent School District McAllen Medical Center McAllen Transitional Care Center Med-Life EMS, LLC Medx Staffing - Denver Michigan Freeze Pack

Mission Regional Medical Center MMR Constructors, Inc. MMR Group Molina Healthcare Net Solutions and Security, LLC - Austin Nyati Services, Inc O'Reilly Auto Parts **OutWest Express, LLC PA Foam Insulators** Palm Valley Construction Company Palm Valley Health Care Parker Automotive Pharr Emergency Medical Services Platinum Electrical Services, Inc. PNC Bank Presidente Home Health Provision Home Care Services, LLC Pure Physical Therapy & Pilates Rango, Inc. **Rio Grande Regional Hospital Rosendin Electric**

Schwickert's Tecta America Selah Hospice Care Solara Specialty Hospitals - McAllen South Texas Health System - Edinburg South Texas Health System Heart Spanish Meadows of Brownsville ST Electric, LLC Superior HealthPlan Texas Health Care Imaging TheraEx Staffing Services **Thermo Fisher Scientific** TRS Facility Services, LLC **United Launch Alliance** Valley Baptist Medical Center - Brownsville Valley Baptist Medical Center – Harlingen Vallev Regional Medical Center **Xtreme Security & Fire** Zitro Electric, LLC

The best way to fight poverty is to empower people through access to quality education. ~John Legend

THE VIDA PHILOSOPHY

At the core of the VIDA philosophy is the people we serve. To serve them, we maintain a relentless focus on the socioeconomic development of the entire Rio Grande Valley. Economic development requires a skilled workforce, and our proven model leads participants to targeted, high-demand occupations with competitive wages. At VIDA, we know that celebrating job placement as the fulfillment of our goal is shortsighted, for it is only through job retention that our communities will thrive. Job retention gives our graduates the opportunity to be self-sufficient taxpayers who support their families while sustaining and advancing the companies where they work. Our investment in human capital allows residents of the RGV to break the cycle of unemployment and public assistance and instead become a vital part of a thriving economy.

THE VIDA MISSION

To fulfill the mission of VIDA, relationships with new and existing educational and economic partners is imperative. Through these community partnerships, we address workforce demands in our region by preparing unemployed and underemployed residents for high-skill, high-demand careers with competitive compensation, thereby achieving economic mobility.

OUR STRATEGIC PROGRAM MODEL

Poverty, lack of guidance and support, stress, tuition costs, other academic-related expenses, raising children in a single-parent household—these represent merely a handful of the hurdles faced by many Rio Grande Valley residents, hurdles often too lofty to overcome. These are the barriers and challenges that have historically prevented our underserved populace from completing lifechanging, industry-recognized certifications and degrees. These are the circumstances and the unique demographic VIDA strives to target for socioeconomic prosperity and workforce development success.

Through VIDA's strategic program model, we have maintained a 94 percent persistence rate this year. VIDA's model has our participants at its center, and each wraparound support service has been carefully designed to target the hurdles they face.

Our career counselors meet individually with all participants to address their social and economic barriers. Budgeting, financial planning, meeting family responsibilities, coping with life stressors, mental health, and time management represent a few of the topics covered during their weekly counseling sessions. Group sessions allow VIDA career counselors to provide soft-skills training, such as interview preparation. effective study habits, resume building, and financial management. Guest speakers serve as subject-matter experts and mentors, expanding the knowledge and life skills of our participants as they learn about investments, retirement planning, team building, professional development, and more. Furthermore, VIDA's model incorporates volunteering to encourage the importance of social responsibility and the

role of an active community member, in an effort to develop well-rounded leaders.

The financial challenges faced by our participants rise far beyond tuition costs. As a result, VIDA also provides customized financial assistance with textbooks, tools, equipment, transportation, uniforms, child care, and countless other expenses. These support services are only made possible through generous contributions from local and state governments, private foundations, and individual donors. Education builds the best workforce, but it is through community support and partnerships that VIDA expands accessibility to higher education through its wraparound student-support approach, the hallmark of the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement.

FELIDA VILLARREAL President & CEO

IRMA GARCIA Chief Program Officer

ISIDRO "SID" RAMOS Director of Workforce & Economic Development

VERONICA MONTEMAYOR Director of Finance SAN JUANITA SANCHEZ Case Manager/Career Counselor

STEPHANIE FLOREZ Case Manager/Career Counselor

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Brownsville Satellite Office

UTB / TSC • 80 Fort Brown Student Service Building • Brownsville, TX DA

VALLEY INITIATIVE FOR

DEVELOPMENT & ADVANCEMENT \$2500

YOUR DONATIONS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE!

Did you know we are fully funded by local, state, and federal governments, grants, private foundations, and generous donations from individuals and companies in our community? Each dollar donated plays a vital role in the VIDA mission, and we make donating easy. Just go to vidacareers.org and click on DONATE at the top of the page. You can make a one-time or monthly donation using PayPal or your debit/credit card. Thank you!