

Our planet matters

UTRGV celebrates at Earth Fest

Sofia M. Cantú Saucedo

THE RIDER

UTRGV's Office for Sustainability hosted Earth Fest 2024 Tuesday on the Quad on the Edinburg campus and Wednesday on the Student Union lawn on the Brownsville campus.

Marianella Q. Franklin, chief sustainability officer, said the office was established in 2009.

"We're here to help institutionalize sustainability and report on how sustainable all the departments are," Franklin said.

She said Earth Fest is about "outreach and awareness on what is happening to our planet."

"Earth Fest is really important because this is where we help our students, staff, faculty and our community come together and kind of celebrate the incredible planet that we live in," Franklin said.

Earth Fest featured the same activities on both campuses.

On April 20, the Office of Sustainability hosted the "Vaqueros Day of Service," where students helped with on-campus beautification projects on the Edinburg and Brownsville campuses.

A critical safety source and emergency preparedness event took place Tuesday in Edinburg, Wednesday in Brownsville and Thursday in Harlingen.

John Brush, an urban ecologist from Quinta Mazatlan and Bill Green, an urban forester from the Texas A&M University Forest Service served as guides on a nature walk through the Edinburg campus. Jerald Garrett, See **EARTH**, Page 3



Natalie Lapsley/THE RIDER ILLUSTRATION

ON CAMPUS:



UTRGV basketball player arrested, charged with assault

Page 2

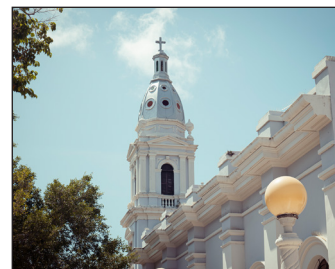
ON CAMPUS:



Empower survivors, educate allies

Page 3

A&E:



Theatre students showcase original plays in Puerto Rico

Page 6

SPORTS:



Women's swimming, men's soccer to compete in the WAC

Page 8

Brownsville propositions on special election ballot

Viviana Infante

THE RIDER

Voters in Brownsville and its growth area, known as extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ), can cast ballots on Propositions A and B in the May 4 Special Election.

Early voting began April 22 and will end Tuesday.

Approval of Proposition A would establish the Greater Brownsville Municipal Development District. The district would be "dedicated towards fostering economic growth and enhancing the quality of life within Brownsville and its ETJ (city's growth area)," according to an April 15 news release on the City of Brownsville's website.

The development district would be funded by a sales tax increase imposed on residents in the city's ETJ area. The sales tax would increase from 6.25% to 6.75%,

about five cents on every \$10 purchase, according to brownsvilletxmd.com. The sales tax, which would not increase in the city, would fund projects within city limits and in the city's growth area.

Approval of Proposition B would terminate the city's existing economic development agencies, the Brownsville Community Improvement Corp. and the Greater Brownsville Incentives Corp. Residents within city limits can vote on both propositions, while residents in the ETJ can vote on Proposition A, according to the news release.

Brownsville Mayor John Cowen said the response from the public for the propositions has been

See **VOTE**, Page 3



Natalie Lapsley/THE RIDER ILLUSTRATION

Edinburg Police consider uses for forfeiture funds

Eduardo Escamilla

THE RIDER

The Edinburg Police Department is considering how to use \$503,024.49 in forfeiture funds it received from the U.S. Border Patrol.

During an April 16 City Council meeting, the U.S. Border Patrol awarded funds to the department, as previously reported by The Rider.

"We need to be equitable in how we utilize any funds that come into the hands of law enforcement," said Edinburg Police Chief Jaime Ayala in an interview with The Rider. "And so everything gets evaluated, the training needs, equipment needs. All of those things get evaluated and then prioritized."

The funds stem from a traffic stop conducted by Edinburg police on April 5, 2023, which resulted in the seizure of \$711,240 in currency. The stop was initiated after the Border Patrol reported a vehicle suspected of transporting illicit funds.

"The Border Patrol had already attempted to stop this vehicle on several occasions, and contacted other law enforcement to provide support, but due



Aura Velasquez/THE RIDER

Edinburg Police Chief Jaime Ayala speaks about the allocation of forfeiture funds it received from the U.S. Border Patrol during an interview with The Rider last Wednesday at the Edinburg Police Department.

to them being busy they were not able to," RGV Sector Chief Gloria I. Chavez said during the meeting. "Edinburg PD did respond and ... acting promptly on the intelligence, they conducted a traffic stop."

See **MONEY**, Page 10

THE RIDER

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UTRGV basketball player arrested, charged with assault

Ali Halloum

SPORTS REPORTER

A player on the UTRGV Men's Basketball Team was arrested and charged with two counts of misdemeanor assault following a confrontation that started during a game of pickup basketball.

Around 3:30 p.m. April 20, University Police responded to an assault in progress at the University Recreation Center on the Edinburg campus.

The incident began over an

argument on the UREC courts, according to UTRGV Assistant Chief of Police Van Slusser.

"There was a recreational game going on, and some of the participants that were all students there got into an argument and it escalated into a physical confrontation," Slusser said.

Patrick Gonzales, vice president of University Marketing and Communications, confirmed that Saliou Seye, a junior forward who played 27

games for the UTRGV Men's Basketball Team during the 2023-24 season was arrested by University Police after two students were assaulted.

"Through investigation [we] did determine that two assaults did occur," Slusser said. "The suspect, which was a male student, he was subsequently arrested and charged with assault."

Seye was charged with two counts of misdemeanor assault, one class A and one class C, and was booked into

the Hidalgo County Jail.

He was later arraigned on the Class A misdemeanor assault April 22 at the Edinburg Municipal Court.

Records show he was released on a \$10,000 personal recognizance bond Tuesday.

On Tuesday, The Rider submitted a public information request to UTRGV for the probable cause affidavit. The case remains under investigation.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today Texas Rising Tabling

Texas Rising will host a weekly tabling event from 11 a.m. to noon on the University Library lawn on the Brownsville campus. The group advocates for civil liberties.

Exploring the Mind

The Psychology Club will host an informational talk about the different psychology research labs and mental health-related graduate programs at UTRGV from 1 to 4 p.m. in the University Recreation Center on the Edinburg campus.

The Planets Concert

The UTRGV School of Music will present a symphony orchestra directed by Norman Gamboa, a director of orchestral activities, from 7 to 8:30 p.m. in the Performing Arts Complex on the Edinburg campus. Admission is \$6.

Tuesday Breakfast Wrangler

The Student Union will serve free breakfast from 10 a.m. to noon on the Student Union lawn

on the Brownsville campus and at the same time Wednesday on the Chapel Lawn on the Edinburg campus.

Texas Rising Meeting

Texas Rising will host a general meeting to review and update information on events from 2:15 to 3:15 p.m. in Music, Science and Learning Center Room 1.105 on the Brownsville campus.

UTRGV Wind Orchestra

The UTRGV School of Music will present its wind orchestra directed by Ronnie Rios, newly appointed director of UTRGV Athletic Bands, from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Texas Southmost College Performing Arts Center in Brownsville. Admission is \$6.

Wednesday Edinburg Bible Study

Christians at RGV will host a Bible study from 12:30 to 1:45 p.m. in Student Academic

Center Room 1.103 on the Edinburg campus.

Free Lunch

The Catholic Student Association will serve a free lunch to UTRGV students, faculty and staff from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. in the Newman Student Catholic Center in Edinburg.

Environmental Awareness Club

The Environmental Awareness Club will meet from 1 to 3:30 p.m. in Student Union Room 2.418 on the Edinburg campus to discuss fundraisers, field trips and symposiums.

Thursday Third General Meeting

Members of the Rio Grande Valley Youth Democratic Socialists of America will host their third and final general meeting of the semester, during which they will review their accomplishments from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. in Liberal

Arts Building North Room 105 on the Edinburg campus.

Suicide Gatekeeper Training

The Psychology Club will host a suicide gatekeeper training where students can learn important lifesaving strategies and techniques from 3 to 5 p.m. in Student Academic Center Room 2.130 on the Edinburg campus.

General Gathering

The Gathering will host a general meeting from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. in Interdisciplinary Engineering & Academic Building Room 1.212 on the Edinburg campus.

May Art Exhibit

An exhibit featuring works by art senior Regina Cerna Matamoros will be on display from May 15 through 22 in the UTRGV Visual Arts Building in Edinburg. The exhibit's closing reception will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. May 22.

--Compiled by Alfredo Garcia Jr.



Scavenger Hunt winners to receive \$50 gift cards

CONGRATS, VAQUEROS



Abigail Ollave/THE RIDER PHOTOS

First-place winner Candence Vaughan, a philosophy student, won a \$50 Tango gift card.



Second-place winner Abigail Gauna, a criminal justice student, won a \$50 Tango gift card.

Empower survivors, educate allies

Yamilet Galvez

THE RIDER

The Office of Advocacy and Violence Prevention, UTRGV University Police and Student Health hosted Denim Day on Tuesday and Wednesday on both campuses to show support for survivors in observance of Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

Denim Day originated in 1992 in Rome, Italy, when the Italian Supreme Court overturned a rape conviction regarding a case involving an 18-year-old woman and a driving instructor, according to denimday.org

Cesar Quintanilla, a health educator for both campuses, said the victim was wearing jeans.

“A student who was wearing jeans at the time ... the judge claimed that her jeans were so tight that she must have taken them off by herself,” Quintanilla said. “So, [the defendant] was set free.”

He said survivors of sexual violence are honored by wearing blue jeans to show solidarity.

“The purpose of wearing these jeans is to create awareness and that under no circumstances wearing jeans is an invitation for you to rape me,” Quintanilla said.

Vaqueros showed support for victims and survivors Tuesday in the Main Courtyard in Brownsville and Wednesday on the Quad in Edinburg.

Students shared their words of support by writing messages to survivors on blue jeans, which were displayed on the Quad.

Organizations that



Abigail Ollave/THE RIDER PHOTOS

Accounting junior Juan Ramirez (left) plays a round of Connect 4 with Mariana Lopez, crime victim liaison for the City of Edinburg Police Department. The Office for Advocacy and Violence Prevention, UTRGV Police Department and Student Health hosted Denim Day Wednesday on the Quad on the Edinburg campus.



Mechanical engineering freshman Rocío Acosta (left) visits the Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners booth during Denim Day Wednesday on the Quad on the Edinburg campus. Also shown are Forensic Nurse Examiners Ashley Oviedo (center) and Maria Gonzalez.

participated included the Doctors Hospital at Renaissance Rape Crisis Center, Behavioral Health Solutions of South Texas, City of Edinburg and ACCESS Esperanza Clinics.

Macie Blohowiak, a sociology senior, said providing information is important.

“I think it’s great that the university is spreading

awareness about sexual harassment,” Blohowiak said. “... I’m glad that we have a day to give this information out to everybody.”

Peace Over Violence, a violence prevention center in Los Angeles, recognized the first Denim Day in the United States in 1999, according to its website.

Priscilla Palacios, coordinator for OAVP, said the office’s services are free and confidential.

“We are confidential advocates on our campus,” Palacios said. “We are here to help them understand the process of not just reporting to law enforcement but also reporting to our campus

Title IX office. We help them understand what their rights are, what resources are available for them.”

OAVP has a trauma-informed counselor to provide services.

Palacios wants to remind students that the office provides emotional support.

“We guide them along the

See DENIM, Page 10

EARTH

Continued from Page 1

research assistant for the School of Earth, Environmental and Marine Sciences guided the walk on the Brownsville campus.

The Office of Sustainability gave students binoculars to the first 20 participants on the nature walk, “so they can get a close-up of some of the birds and butterflies and bees on campus,” Franklin said.

A yoga basic stretch class by Jessica Perez, a fitness instructor, took place on both campuses.

Reese Nittler, a biology junior, said her service learning group for ecology class was giving out free native plant and wildflower seed bombs to promote pollinator growth in the Rio Grande Valley.

Nittler said the event is “an incredible opportunity.”

“I encourage anyone who cares about our planet to step in and save it,” she said.

The UTRGV Police Department shared safety tips and taught students how to service their bicycles.

Luis Carlos Panqueva, executive chef from Chartwells dining services, demonstrated how to prepare spring rolls at the “Cowboy Kitchen” outside El Comedor on the Brownsville campus.

Monica Martinez, an assistant professor for the School of Music, performed a song on the French horn

on both campuses.

“She has a beautiful piece that’s done with horn and it’s called ‘The Pale Blue Dot,’” Franklin said. “This is a musical piece that comes with a video also, which is really beautiful.”

Savannah Mares, a sustainability ambassador from the College Green Captains, performed two scenes from the play called “Somewhere: A Primer for the End of Days,” a play on climate change that features butterfly characters on both campuses.

Ana Pacheco, a communications sciences and disorders freshman, said it is important to participate in these events.

“I encourage other students to participate because, as a whole community, we can bring awareness about our Earth,” Pacheco said.

Elaine Hernandez read her book “Her Butterfly Effect: When the Evergreens Blossomed Orange,” which is “a tale of hope, inspiration, and transformation,” according to the synopsis.

The book “tells the story of a group of Mexican farm animals who rebuild their homes and farm while saving a flock of migrating monarch butterflies,” Franklin said, reading the synopsis.

To close Earth Fest, the Edinburg Palm Valley Animal Society and the Brownsville Animal Regulation and Care Center hosted a mutt strut on the Edinburg and Brownsville campuses respectively.



Angel Ballesteros/THE RIDER PHOTOS
Debani Alaffa (left), an integrated health science junior, and Abigail Diaz, an art education junior, pet Palm Valley Animal Society dogs Tuesday during Earth Fest on the Quad on the Edinburg campus.



Luis Carlos Panqueva (right), Chartwells executive chef, serves food Tuesday to Joanna Montoya, a communication sciences and disorders senior, during Earth Fest on the Student Union Quad on the Edinburg campus.

VOTE

Continued from Page 1

positive from his perspective.

“I think, you know, the community realizes this is an opportunity to help move the needle in ... a stronger way to increase the amount of revenue we get for quality-of-life projects and economic development projects,” Cowen said.

He said he has not personally received any comments from ETJ residents but thinks Proposition A will allow the city to do more projects that will benefit their area as well.

Roy De los Santos, District 3 commissioner, said the public has been curious and inquisitive from the response he has seen.

“They want to know facts about it,” De los Santos said. “That’s the interaction that I’ve had with members of the community. Aside from that, I have seen several folks posting online that after doing their homework, they are supporting the MDD and giving their reasons why. And I’m very happy to see that.”

De los Santos said projects that could be funded with the sales tax increase include parks, museums and trails in the ETJ. He said the funds could also help make improvements and open businesses to create jobs in the ETJ.

The frequently asked questions section on brownsvillexmdd.com states the development district would be governed by a board appointed by the City Commission.

The Rider asked if the commission would appoint a representative from the ETJ area.

De los Santos replied it is up to each member of the commission.

He said anyone who lives within the city or ETJ is eligible to serve.



What is some advice you can give to others during finals week?



“Some advice I’d give for people going into finals would be: eat some good breakfast and hold yourself accountable. Don’t play games.”

Daniel Flores
mathematics senior



“Don’t procrastinate. Do not procrastinate because I always do better in my finals when I study ahead of time, so that’s the advice I would give.”

Ana Alfaro
computer engineering senior



“Get sleep, that’s basically it. You can study as hard as you want, but if you are knocking out during your test that is not good.”

Ingrid Silva
mechanical engineering freshman



“The biggest thing is don’t procrastinate, even when you are like, ‘Uh, I don’t want to get it done.’ It’s gonna feel a lot worse on you if you just wait until the last minute, so just make it a whole day, get some snacks, put on some mood lighting and then just lock in.”

Jo Perez
theatre sophomore

--Compiled and photos by Aura Velasquez and Daniela Martinez Salazar

So, what’s next?



Jesse Valencia
ONLINE EDITOR

As a senior, two of the most common questions people ask me are, “What are you going to do next?” and “What’s next after you graduate?”

At the time of publication for this column, it will be my final week in the Student Media Department and I will be two weeks from walking the stage and accepting my diploma, marking the end of my undergraduate journey and officially graduating from UTRGV.

“What’s next?” can be an intimidating question to answer. With so many options available, such as further education or going straight into finding job prospects, it can be challenging to decide on the next step to take.

Personally, when I was asked, I found it difficult to come up with an exact answer at times.

The transition of coming to

terms with the reality of leaving university can be challenging and overwhelming, and is something that hit me with a lot of emotions as my graduation date approaches.

It’s a time when we’re leaving behind a significant part of our lives, trying to figure out what comes next and feeling overwhelmed by the possibilities and uncertainties.

After all, college is where we’ve spent a significant portion of our lives, making lifelong connections and building our academic and personal achievements.

It’s natural to feel anxious or scared about entering “the real world,” as people say, and leaving behind the comfort of the familiar surroundings that we’ve known for years to enter a new chapter of our lives.

There’s a sense of pressure to make the right choices and not let all the effort that we’ve put in over the years go to waste.

It’s easy to get caught up in feelings of uncertainty, but it’s important to remember that this is a time to celebrate our accomplishments and not let the fear of the future diminish the hard work we’ve put in.

Every experience we’ve had during our time in school has helped us grow and develop into the people we are today.

Even if we don’t know what

the future holds, we should be proud of everything we have accomplished so far.

To all my fellow graduates, I want to say this: Though the future may seem uncertain, it’s important to trust in ourselves, our abilities and the knowledge we’ve gained during our college years.

As you walk the stage to receive your diploma, remember you are capable of achieving great things and, though the future may have many pathways, you have the power to shape and decide that future for yourselves.

So, embrace this new chapter with confidence and make the most of the opportunities that lay ahead, and I wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

Finally, to the Student Media Department, I would like to take what will be my final published work here to say, thank you for giving me the opportunity to have been a part of this department.

As dramatic as it may sound, it was truly a life-changing journey that has helped me grow both personally and professionally.

It has been an absolute pleasure to be a part of this department and to have had the opportunity to work with such an amazing and dedicated team.

utrgvrider.com

WACKY WEB POLL

WOULD YOU RATHER GRADUATE DEBT-FREE BUT WITHOUT ANY JOB PROSPECTS OR GRADUATE WITH STUDENT LOAN DEBT BUT HAVE A GUARANTEED JOB IN YOUR DREAM FIELD?

16.67%	83.33%
GRADUATE DEBT-FREE BUT WITHOUT ANY JOB PROSPECTS	GRADUATE WITH LOAN DEBT BUT A GUARANTEED JOB IN YOUR DREAM FIELD

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Letter to the editor

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Propuestas de Brownsville en la boleta electoral especial



Eduardo Cortez /FOTO RIDER

El Greater Brownsville Incentives Corp. (GBIC) está ubicado en 500 E. St. Charles St. La Proposición A, que los votantes considerarán en la Elección Especial de la Ciudad de Brownsville del 4 de mayo, propone poner fin al GBIC y a Brownsville Community Improvement Corp. para crear "el Distrito de Desarrollo Municipal del Gran Brownsville y la imposición de un impuesto sobre las ventas y el uso a razón de la mitad del uno por ciento (0.50%) con el fin de financiar proyectos de desarrollo".

Viviana Infante THE RIDER

Los votantes de Brownsville y su área de crecimiento, conocida como jurisdicción extraterritorial (ETJ por sus siglas en inglés), pueden votar sobre las Proposiciones A y B en la Elección Especial del 4 de mayo.

La votación anticipada comenzó el 22 de abril y finalizará el martes.

La aprobación de la Propuesta A establecería el Distrito de Desarrollo Municipal del Gran Brownsville. El distrito estaría "dedicado a fomentar el crecimiento económico y mejorar la calidad de vida dentro de Brownsville y su ETJ (área de crecimiento de la ciudad)", según un comunicado de prensa del 15 de abril en el sitio web de la ciudad de Brownsville.

El distrito de desarrollo se financiaría mediante un aumento de impuesto sobre las ventas a los residentes en el área ETJ de la ciudad. El impuesto sobre las ventas aumentaría del 6.25% al 6.75%, aproximadamente cinco centavos por cada compra de \$10, según brownsvillexmdd.com. El impuesto a las ventas, que no aumentaría en la ciudad, financiaría proyectos dentro de los límites de la ciudad y en el área de crecimiento de la ciudad.

La aprobación de la Proposición B pondría fin a las agencias de desarrollo económico existentes en la ciudad, *Brownsville Community Improvement Corp.* y *Greater Brownsville Incentives Corp.* Los residentes dentro de los límites de la ciudad pueden votar sobre ambas propuestas, mientras que los residentes en ETJ pueden votar sobre la Proposición A, según el comunicado de prensa.

El alcalde de Brownsville, John Cowen, dijo que la respuesta del público a las propuestas ha sido positiva desde su perspectiva.

"Creo que la comunidad se da cuenta de que esta es una oportunidad para ayudar a avanzar

[...] una forma más sólida de aumentar la cantidad de ingresos que obtenemos para proyectos de calidad de vida y proyectos de desarrollo económico", dijo Cowen.

Dijo que no ha recibido personalmente ningún comentario de los residentes de ETJ, pero cree que la Propuesta A permitirá a la ciudad realizar más proyectos que también beneficiarán a su área.

en la ETJ. Dijo que los fondos también podrían ayudar a realizar mejoras y abrir negocios para crear empleos en el ETJ.

La sección de preguntas frecuentes en brownsvillexmdd.com afirma que el distrito de desarrollo estaría gobernado por una junta designada por la Comisión de la Ciudad.

La Cláusula preguntó si la comisión nombraría a un representante del área

"Simplemente no hay mucha actividad económica en el ETJ", dijo Kaswan. "Pero aparte de eso, fusionar las dos entidades no va a tener ningún impacto directo porque simplemente se trata de tomar funciones que ya existen y están funcionando, al menos en algún nivel, y unir las bajo un mismo techo".

Dijo que es un poco escéptico sobre el distrito de desarrollo.

"Ni el GBIC ni el BCIC tienen el mayor historial en términos de éxito, en términos de uso efectivo del dinero", dijo Kaswan.

"Combinarlos en una sola entidad significa que hay menos personas involucradas en ese proceso porque entonces solo tienes una comisión", dijo.

Kaswan dijo que su otra preocupación es que los funcionarios electos inviertan dinero en grandes proyectos provenientes del exterior o de personas que no son de la comunidad.

"Parte de la razón por la que puedes atraer esas empresas es porque les das incentivos", dijo. "Esos incentivos sólo duran un tiempo. Cuando se acaban los incentivos, las empresas se van".

Kaswan dijo que la preocupación no es el aumento del impuesto sobre las ventas sino cómo se utilizará el dinero.

De los Santos dijo que las propuestas son una oportunidad para generar ingresos adicionales.

"En última instancia, será dinero que se reinvertirá en la comunidad local", dijo. "Así que es en beneficio de los ciudadanos".

Hasta el miércoles, se habían emitido 2,465 votos anticipados en la elección especial, según cifras del Departamento de Elecciones y Registro de Votantes del Condado de Cameron.

Los votantes pueden visitar brownsvillexmdd.com para obtener más información sobre las propuestas.

"Creo que la comunidad se da cuenta de que esta es una oportunidad para ayudar a avanzar [...] una forma más sólida de aumentar la cantidad de ingresos que obtenemos para proyectos de calidad de vida y proyectos de desarrollo económico".

-John Cowen, alcalde de Brownsville

Roy De los Santos, comisionado del Distrito 3, dijo que el público ha sentido curiosidad por las respuestas que ha visto.

"Quieren saber hechos al respecto", dijo De los Santos. "Esa es la interacción que he tenido con miembros de la comunidad. Aparte de eso, he visto a varias personas publicar en línea que, después de hacer su tarea, apoyan al MDD y dan sus razones. Y estoy muy feliz de ver eso".

De los Santos dijo que los proyectos que podrían financiarse con el aumento del impuesto sobre las ventas incluyen parques, museos y senderos

de ETJ.

De los Santos respondió que depende de cada miembro de la comisión.

Dijo que cualquier persona que viva dentro de la ciudad o ETJ es elegible para servir.

"No hay ningún mandato que tenga que ser alguien del ETJ, pero alentamos absolutamente a la gente del ETJ a presentar su solicitud", dijo De los Santos.

Mark Kaswan, profesor del Departamento de Ciencias Políticas, dijo que la fusión de las dos agencias actuales en el distrito de desarrollo no generará tantos ingresos.

Theatre students showcase original plays in Puerto Rico

Silvana Villarreal
A&E REPORTER

Last month, 11 students and two faculty from the Theatre Department at UTRGV set forth on a trip to Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico in Ponce to watch and showcase original theatrical work.

The Department of Theatre was encouraged and enabled to take the trip by Latino Theatre Initiatives, the Center for Latin American Arts and College of Fine Arts Dean Jeffery Ward in order to create and strengthen a relationship with the university in Puerto Rico.

The trip's March 19-24 itinerary for the UTRGV students included watching other participating colleges compete against each other while showcasing their own performances, exploring the city and performing.

Universities competing were Universidad de Puerto Rico at Río Piedras, who placed first, Universidad Católica de Puerto Rico, host school who came in second, Universidad de Puerto Rico at Ponce, Universidad de Puerto Rico at Mayaguez and Universidad del Sagrado Corazón. A panel of theatre professionals judged the competition.

In total, the play, "Ni de aquí, ni de allá: A través del Valle," consisted of five short pieces written, performed and directed in Spanish by UTRGV students.

"This play, created by university students from the Rio Grande Valley in the South of Texas, brings actors' stories to life—with gangsters, autism, intimidation, family dysfunction and a longing for home, dramatized with humor, honesty and happiness," reads the UTRGV students original play's program in Spanish.

The play consisted of a team of 13 students: directors Karina Molina and Maximilian Cano, actors Miranda Hernandez Rolando Garza, Lina Ortiz, Scot Johnson and Natalie Palacios, stage manager Dinorah Treviño, assistant stage manager Azuzena Bazan, light operator Gustavo Castorena, sound operator Valeria Mendoza, photographer Jonah Longoria



PHOTOS COURTESY ERIC WILEY

UTRGV and Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico theatre students enjoy a meal together March 23 at a restaurant in Ponce, Puerto Rico.

and program and props operator Angelica Gonzalez.

The participating students were chosen in auditions that took place in the fall semester to be cast in one or several of the plays that would be performed in Puerto Rico.

"They created this play about their own lives," theatre Professor Eric Wiley said. "So there [were] five performers, and each one presented a play about their own lives, about growing up, about life in the Valley."

Wiley said the students did not only gain experience and knowledge in theater but also witnessed cultural similarities between Puerto Rico and the Rio Grande Valley.

He said watching the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico perform was a "highly enriching opportunity," which included more dancing incorporated into their production and was interesting to compare and contrast between what they are used to and what they witnessed.

"The students were exposed to numerous other college theatre programs," Wiley said. "It gave them a chance to reflect on our theatre program and the type of theatre we do and how we treat theatre by comparing it to what they were seeing in



UTRGV theatre students conduct an exercise with students from the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico theater program March 23 in Puerto Rico.

a very faraway place that's very different from the Valley."

Theatre, film production sophomore Jonah Longoria was brought on to the team to record and photograph the journey and create a documentary.

Longoria said that going into the project, he expected his world view to change. He said visiting Puerto Rico put things into perspective and is grateful for living in the Valley.

"Watching the theatres, the theatre shows, it inspired me," Longoria said. "It gave you some ideas for filmmaking, which is kind of unique, getting inspired by theatre for filmmaking."

He saw the different emotions the UTRGV performers went through before and during the performance, such as nerves,

excitement and stress.

"It was interesting to see when they're actually there and seeing how their moods change, the way they conduct themselves," Longoria said.

He said that although he did not understand much of the dialogue in the play, he was able to understand what each short was trying to convey through each movement and emotion shown on stage.

"You don't really have to understand Spanish to get the play, because there's a lot of visual things happening," Longoria said. "They use props. It's a unique play. I've never seen something like that before."



SUMMER PLANS RECOMMENDATIONS:



Jorge Orizaga
political science junior
visit the public pool



Vijay Radhakrishnan
biomedical science junior
get a job



Faith Soto
counseling graduate student
visit the beach, summer camp
and spending time with family



Rebecca Muñoz
ocean, coastal and earth
sciences graduate student
read a book outside

--Compiled and photos
by Silvana Villarreal
and Fernanda Gonzalez

SWEET CRISPY SOUSHIES

Scientists say fish likely have consciousness.

Why are humans so weird?

04/20

SUDOKU

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April 22 puzzle answer key:

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6	7	4	3	1	5	8	2	9
1	9	2	8	7	6	4	5	3
7	2	9	1	8	3	6	4	5
3	8	5	2	6	4	9	7	1
4	1	6	5	9	7	3	8	2

More is MORE

Eduardo Escamilla
THE RIDER

House of Fashion's "Project Camp" took center stage at the AB Event Center in Edinburg, offering a vibrantly theatrical escape for those who crave fashion's most outrageous expressions.

The fashion sent down the runway April 20 playfully pushed the boundaries of taste, wholeheartedly embracing the non-mainstream.

American writer and critic Susan Sontag cemented the term's meaning in her 1964 essay, "Notes on 'Camp,'" describing it as a sensibility readily apparent but difficult to define.

It is an aesthetic movement

reveling in stylization and artifice, elevating the intentionally excessive and ironically tacky to a place of artistic merit, according to Sontag.

Natalia Ozuna, a marketing senior and stylist for the student organization at UTRGV, told The Rider after the fashion show that her inspiration came from the sneakers she wore that night.

"I wanted to put them on the outfit, but we didn't have the same shoe size," Ozuna said about the outfit she styled. "I was kinda going for something like Frankenstein, like, clown sort of vibe. [The outfit] is just kind of accidental. I was just, like, piecing it together and, like, figuring it out from there."



Eduardo Escamilla/THE RIDER PHOTOS

Studio art sophomore Damian Peña models an outfit designed by social work junior Karina de la Garza and assistant designer Nayeli Vasquez, a communication studies junior.



Biology senior Angelika Garza models an outfit styled by early care and early childhood education sophomore Kimberly Vela-Elizondo and makeup by psychology senior Kimberly Garza.



Entrepreneurship and innovation sophomore Brandon Briseño (left) and marketing senior and fashion stylist Natalie Ozuna are introduced at the end of the fashion show. Graphic design junior Rebeca Santos was the makeup artist.



Communication studies sophomore Nayeli Vasquez models an outfit designed by social work junior Karina de la Garza and makeup by psychology senior Dulce Mendoza.



Psychology sophomore Juan Rivera models an outfit designed by studio art sophomore Damian Peña.



Ana Lucia Camacho, a film junior and vice president of House of Fashion, models an outfit and makeup she designed.



House of Fashion President Michael Montelongo, a civil engineering sophomore, models bow earrings designed by criminal justice sophomore Angela Cazares, an outfit he designed and makeup by psychology senior Kimberly Garza.

Athlete of the week

Alex Havlicek



PHOTO COURTESY UTRGV ATHLETICS

Alex Havlicek is a business administration graduate student and pitcher for the UTRGV Baseball Team. Havlicek is from Oakland, New Jersey, and moved to the Rio Grande Valley in 2022. He wants to pursue playing for a Major League Baseball team.

Q: What do you do for fun outside of baseball?

A: "I usually play with my two golden retrievers, take them for walks. My girlfriend and I take them for walks; we go hiking. Just anything outdoors, really."

Q: What kind of music do you like?

A: "I pretty much like it all, but lately I've been on a lot of classical rock and metal lately. I like old-school, like, '90's rap and hip-hop too. I would say Wolfmother and Wu-Tang Clan."

Q: What movies or shows do you like?

A: "My favorite movie is 'National Security' with Martin Lawrence, 2003, I think. And my favorite TV show is 'Breaking Bad' or 'The Sopranos,' actually."

Q: What motivates you?

A: "I just play for the Lord. He's blessed me with the talent to play this game and be able to play this game for, now, my sixth year of college. So, I'm grateful for that. On top of that, I have a great support system. My family, my mom and dad, have pretty much done everything for me to help me succeed and get me to where I want to be. I got a wonderful girlfriend, too, and just got really, really, awesome teammates at UTRGV and they're always positive with me. And when things are going bad, they're still with me. So, just my whole support system including my teammates, really."

Q: How did you get started with baseball?

A: "My brother. He never really played baseball, but he's 31 right now. He's eight or nine years older than me, but he always had the Mets on and ever since I was young, I would just watch the Mets with him and we'd go to games and kind of developed from there, really."

Q: Do you have a fun fact about yourself?

A: "I'm pretty good at skateboarding. I started when I was, like, 10 and then, for about two years I did it and got pretty decent at it, I guess. And then I took a break from high school all through, pretty much, until last year is when I bought another skateboard. So yeah, I'm not great, but I'm pretty decent at it."

--Compiled by Jose Medina

Athletics implements loyalty points program



Jose Medina
SPORTS EDITOR

The UTRGV Department of Intercollegiate Athletics introduced the Vaqueros Loyalty Points Program in an April 15 news release.

The department launched the program to honor and reward supporters of athletics, as well as make the process of selecting suites and seats more transparent and fair.

There are several ways to earn points, including purchasing season tickets for different sports, donating to athletics or being a graduate of UTRGV or its legacy institutions.

Chasse Conque, vice president and director of Athletics, said the points program correlates with how much support the department receives.

Derek Schramm, senior associate athletic director for Advancement and Administration, said the points program has been thought about since the deposits for

football season tickets started in December 2022.

Schramm said there were discussions about a fair way to seat deposit holders, ultimately deciding on the points program.

Eduardo Galvan, associate athletic director for

the suite selection process in December for those interested and who have placed deposits for the UTRGV football season. The points accumulated up to Nov. 15 will be considered for their ranking or priority in selection.

Eduardo Cortez/THE RIDER GRAPHIC

tickets. We'll use this for our parking and tailgating, priority in allocation. We'll use it for any kind of new season tickets and seat upgrades, not just for football but for basketball, baseball, volleyball, so it won't just be for football."

Conque encourages those interested in football tickets to buy them before they are unavailable.

"We've been promoting our deposit program," he said. "We really want to encourage as many people that think they want tickets, now is the

"We wanted to make sure it was truly fair and transparent."

--Eduardo Galvan, associate athletic director for Development and Premium Seating

Development and Premium Seating, said working on the loyalty points program was "truly a team effort."

"It takes everyone, right?" Galvan said. "We all work on it, we all get our eyes and hands on it at some point. ... We kind of took it around and stress tested it internally with key leadership at the university level and also our athletic department. ... We wanted to make sure it was truly fair and transparent."

Tickets will go through

"Very similarly, in January, we'll take that snapshot of the current rank of the points, and we will assign dates or times for all the people who have placed their deposit to pick seats," Galvan said.

Schramm notes the points program is planned to be used in the future for other programs.

"We will be implementing this across the board as well," he said. "So it will be used for any kind of post-season tournament

time. ... There will come a point where ... our season ticket allotment will be sold out."

Conque said the threshold has not been decided yet, but there might be a limit for season tickets.

"We want to make sure that we have good accommodations for our students, make sure we have good availability for student tickets, good availability for bands and visiting bands, visiting teams," he said.

@UTRGVRIDER



Women's swimming, men's soccer to compete in the WAC

Ali Halloum

SPORTS REPORTER

The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics announced UTRGV's men's soccer and women's swimming and diving programs will remain members of the Western Athletic Conference in an April 17 news release.

When the university announced its intention to leave the WAC and join the Southland Conference, the two programs were notably excluded from the move. With this announcement, they have now found a more permanent home.

Both programs will play their seasons in the Fall 2024 semester, with 2024 marking the inaugural season of the women's swimming and diving program.

UTRGV Vice President and Director of Athletics Chasse Conque spoke to The Rider and said he and President Guy Bailey discussed the future of the programs with the WAC when they declared their intention to move to the Southland.

"I'm really grateful to the WAC, really grateful to Commissioner [Brian] Thornton for entertaining the thought," Conque said. "Furthermore, I'm really grateful to the president and the athletic directors in the WAC because those are the individuals that have to vote on membership. And so, to be able to have their support, and their support of our student-athletes in those two programs, very, very grateful that we get to remain in the WAC and continue to be part of the strong traditions in both swimming and men's soccer."

Asked if this means that UTRGV remains on the hook for the WAC exit fee, Conque replied the realignment is going to be "budget-neutral" for the university.

"This move is really gonna be budget-neutral for us in a lot of different ways ... from a variety of different angles," he said. "As you look at the arrangement that we have as a member of the Southland Conference financially, this is gonna be a great move, budget-neutral, and actually more beneficial as we make some cost savings as we make the shift."

Conque said both the men's soccer and women's swimming and diving programs will be playing in the WAC "for the foreseeable future."

The programs were excluded from the Southland move because they do not sponsor women's swimming and diving or men's soccer, according to Conque.

Due to this, the plan was to have these programs remain as WAC affiliates while the other 14 athletic programs make the move to the Southland.

Women's swimming and diving head coach Betsy Graham said she is "excited" to start the inaugural season of the program in the WAC, which she described as having "strong" competition.

"I know that the WAC has some



RIDER FILE PHOTOS

UTRGV graduate midfielder Reda Ikarrain tries to steal the ball away from University of Nevada, Las Vegas freshman forward Lucas Gélébart during a Sept. 28 game at the UTRGV Soccer and Track & Field Complex on the Edinburg campus. Also shown is UTRGV junior defender Finn O' Connor.



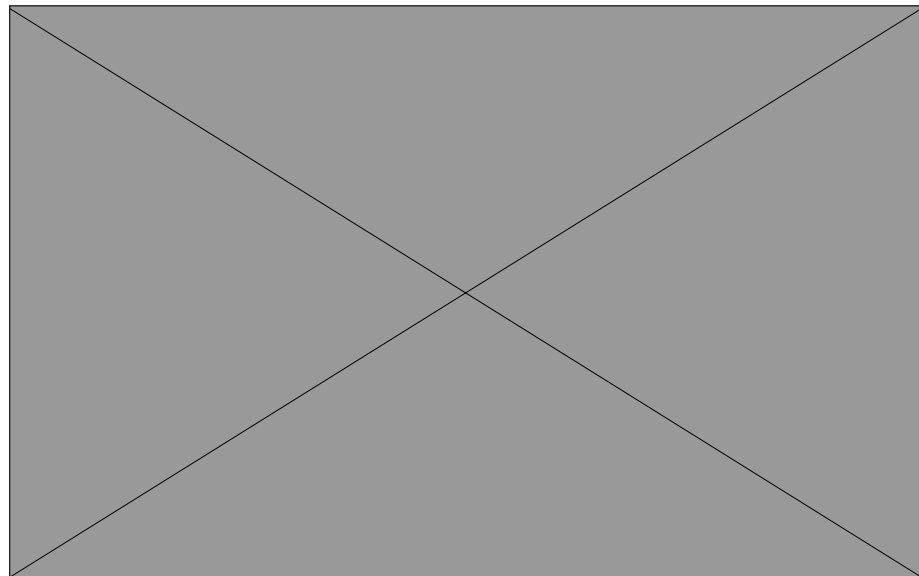
Participants in the TRI-Pharr Warrior Race compete in the Olympic-size pool February 2022 at the City of Pharr Natatorium.

strong schools in it," Graham said. "I believe that we can fit right in with them."

She said she was making her preparations for the inaugural season of the swimming and diving program as if they were playing in the WAC long before the move was officially announced.

Men's soccer head coach Bryheem Hancock told The Rider he is "excited" that he and the student-athletes "know what direction we're going as a program."

"We're excited to be a part of the WAC knowing the history and the opponents that we play, and how good of a conference it's been," Hancock said. "We're excited for a challenge that we'll have this summer to prepare for the fall."



San Jose State University senior goalkeeper David Sweeney jumps at the ball to stop Vaquero senior forward Michael Washington in the second half of the game Oct. 26 at the Soccer and Track & Field Complex on the Edinburg campus.

Sweet success: chocolate factory in Hidalgo

Fatima Gamez Lopez
SPANISH EDITOR

No golden ticket is necessary to experience a sweet adventure at Mozna Chocolate in Hidalgo.

"[It is] the only chocolate factory in South Texas and one [of] only a few in the nation," according to its Facebook page.

The factory, founded in 2015, is located at 115 E. Brazil Ave. and specializes in using single-origin cacao beans.

Mozna Chocolate uses cane sugar and cacao beans to manufacture 70% single-origin cacao chocolate bars.

"By using these two ingredients the original flavors of the cacao beans remain intact, giving our consumers a unique, flavorful and nutritious experience," its website states. "Mozna Chocolate sources cacao beans from Colombia, India, Mexico, Tanzania, Venezuela and Vietnam. Just like coffee and wine, cacao beans inherit specific flavor characteristics according to the region they are grown, creating unique flavorful chocolate bars."

Hassan Mulla and Anthony Matulewicz are the founders and co-owners of Mozna Chocolate.

Daniel Williams, a chocolate producer at Mozna Chocolate, said Mozna is a Polish word that means "You can" or "Si se puede."

The bean-to-bar is a seven-step process that includes sorting, roasting, winnowing, grinding, conching, tempering and molding.

Before making the first chocolate, Matulewicz said he joined a group for chocolate tasters in the world in London.

Because the chocolate industry is regulated in the United States, he had to research the Code of Federal Regulations before starting Mozna.

"I literally traveled to see what were considered the best chocolate makers in the world and just started talking to them and through that, one thing led to the other," Matulewicz said.

He said the design of the Mozna Chocolate logo came from a squirrel.

"A lot of the cacao producers complain that there's this little squirrel that goes and eats the cacao," Matulewicz said. "So, I figured out I needed a little

See **CHOCOLATE**, Page 11



Fatima Gamez Lopez/THE RIDER PHOTOS

Daniel Williams, a chocolate producer at Mozna Chocolate, explains to visitors the grinding process of cocoa during an April 20 tour at the chocolate factory in Hidalgo. Grinding is the process by which cacao nibs are ground into "cocoa liquor." The cocoa liquor is mixed with cacao butter and sugar. The process can take from five to six days.



Mozna Chocolate sources cacao beans from Colombia, India, Mexico, Tanzania, Venezuela and Vietnam.



Victoria Guerrero, an Edinburg resident, pours chocolate into a mold to create her chocolate bar during a tour April 20 at the Mozna Chocolate factory in Hidalgo.

MONEY
Continued from Page 1

The Edinburg Police Department received the allocation through the Equitable Sharing Program, a U.S. Justice Department initiative designed to bolster cooperation between federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

"It gives us an opportunity to work together," Ayala said. "It gives us an opportunity to acquire assets to help the public safety mission."

The program allows seizing assets acquired through crimes, such as drug trafficking, according to Ayala. If the court awards the seized money to the government, it gets distributed to the involved agencies. Part of it goes to processing fees, and the rest can be used to improve public safety.

"This is an unprecedented total," Chavez said during the meeting. "We usually split the cost 50/50 for two agencies on a seizure, but headquarters Border Patrol approved a 70% investment to the Edinburg Police Department."

City Councilmember Place 4 David White proposed allocating some of the seized funds toward mental wellness programs for Edinburg police officers.

During the interview, Ayala said the

department utilizes existing programs such as the Employee Assistance Program and a peer support network.

"I don't anticipate that we would need to spend any further funding on that," he said.

Ayala told The Rider that how the seized funds will be used remains undecided.

"I can't really tell you how we're going to use that money now because we have an ongoing forfeiture fund that we work with," he said. The department allocates resources from that fund based on public safety needs.

In the past, forfeiture funds have been used to enhance equipment and training, according to the police chief.

The U.S Justice Department and U.S Department of the Treasury's Guide to Equitable Sharing for State, Local and Tribal Law Enforcement Agencies states the following permissible uses for the forfeiture funds:

- law enforcement administrative costs
- law enforcement training and education
- law enforcement, public safety and detention facilities
- law enforcement equipment
- joint law enforcement and public safety operation
- contracts for services

- law enforcement travel and per diem
- law enforcement awards and memorials
- drug, gang and other prevention or awareness programs
- law enforcement initiatives that further investigations
- overtime
- salaries.

Edinburg resident Michael Umbae told The Rider that he would like to see those funds go into infrastructure or supplies, but not for weapons.

Umbae said he is concerned about not knowing where the suspect got the money from.

"I don't think it should go to the police, at least not right away," he said. "It feels like it's still an ongoing investigation. ... I feel like more information should be taken before putting it wherever."

Umbae said that if the money was stolen, it should be returned to its rightful owners.

"Until I know where it originally came from, it feels kinda weird," he said.

The Rider emailed RGV Border Patrol Press Officer Roderick Kise on April 24 to request the case number of the arrest on April 5, 2023, but as of press time Friday, he had not responded.

DENIM
Continued from Page 3

way to making sure one, they don't get revictimized and two, understand what they are going through, through that process," she said.

Students can learn more about the warning signs of an unhealthy relationship through OAVP's workshop, Behind the Post. More information can be found on V Link.

UTRGV Police Officer Marco Huerta said the department offers campus safety training to students, faculty and staff.

"It's about a 45-minute presentation," Huerta said. "And we talk a little bit about services that are available to them, the police department, what we're about and the services we provide to them."

The National Sexual Assault Hotline operates around the clock, seven days a week. Services are confidential and free of charge. Callers will be connected with a trained staff member from a local sexual assault service provider. The hotline can be accessed by calling 1-800-656-4673, according to the OAVP page.

Advocacy and counseling services are confidential and free to all students. To make an appointment, email oavp@utrgv.edu or call 665-8287.

CHOCOLATE

Continued from Page 10

animal. ... So, instead of doing a squirrel, we decided to do a chimp and do the logo with a chimp."

He co-wrote a book, "Mozna on the Island of San Lorenzo" with Alejandro Ochoa, who also illustrated it, giving life to the logo by creating the chimp that likes to eat chocolate and lives on the island of San Lorenzo.

"We wanted to create environmental awareness and everything that goes on the island and the volcanoes and all that," Matulewicz said. "I mean, most people don't realize this, but 100% of the cacao that comes from the Americas comes from volcanic soil. ... So, the Americas, which means Mexico, Central America, South America, they all, at one point in their lifetime, had to deal with a volcano."

Williams said chocolate has a lot of health benefits, such as lowering cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar levels.

Matulewicz said he told Mulla about his idea of starting the chocolate factory and from there, they started working on it together.

"One time, I was getting my medical checkup and my doctor told me that he wanted me to have true cacao," Matulewicz said. "And then at that time, I had just finished reading about all the fraud that goes on with olive oil. ... Sometimes, [it is] not really olive oil. ... When the opportunity to start the company came, I had that in the back of my mind."

He said their initial goal was to deliver high-quality dark chocolate.

Matulewicz said South Texas is a good area to make chocolate.

"Our atmospheric pressure and our percentage of humidity are ... perfect to create chocolate," Matulewicz said.

"So, we have that big advantage that the chocolate makers up north don't have, and it's pretty much trial and error. ... We have been doing this for almost 10 years



Fatima Gamez Lopez/THE RIDER

Visitors taste the different chocolates Mozna has during a tour of the factory on April 20.

now. So, we have a very good idea of how flavors interact, what goes well with what, what may be crazy, whatnot. And you start going around. I mean, it's pretty much like they say in Spanish, *jugando a la comida*."

Mozna has a coffee shop in San Antonio. Matulewicz said the plan is to have different points of sale.

"Right now, we are building the second part of our plan where we are going to have classrooms [in the factory]," Matulewicz said. "We are going to be taking this to the area of agriculture and chocolate, but to kind of give more of an exploration to children [during] tours of how physics, biology and chemistry all mixed together to create a product here."

He hopes to do a project with UTRGV for students to get educational tours of a cacao plantation and learn about its process.

Maria Luisa Espinoza, a staff member

at Mozna Chocolate, has been working at the factory for five years.

"For me, this is really an experience because I didn't know where cacao came from, what cacao was or what it tasted like," Espinoza said. "It is an experience to know ... that there are different flavors in each seed, depending on the country."

She said her favorite chocolate flavors are from Tanzania and Venezuela.

"It is very different," Espinoza said. "Tanzania is the one that sells the most and is a little sweeter. It's not that strong. Venezuela is very rich and is a bit strong. Both are very different, but they are the two countries that I liked the most."

Lea Marin, an Edinburg resident, attended the tour for the first time with a single moms group from Vertical Community Church as part of their "Adventure Day."

"It was really interesting," Marin said. "Very informative. Very hands-on and

the tasting was amazing. I learned the original way to make chocolate and how it's made, from it being planted, all the way to your table."

Matulewicz encourages aspiring entrepreneurs to start from the ground up.

"I always say that all businesses start with clean bathrooms," he said. "And what I mean by that is if you take the detail into having clean bathrooms, that means you're going to be taking care of everything. ... Make sure you are trying to do the best you can. So don't take shortcuts and just always learn, always educate yourself and always play around. I believe the quality always sells. So if you worry about having good quality, eventually you'll be up there."

For more information on Mozna Chocolate, visit its website.



Congratulations!



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Station Manager



Amira Garcia
Vaquero Radio
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Andrea Flores
KVAQ-TV
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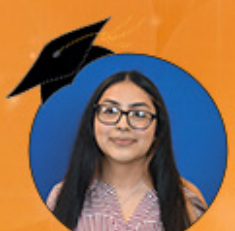
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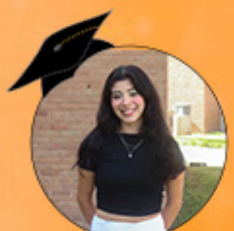
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“The Roommate’s Cat”

by Mario Alliey

Meow!

The dead of night silence was shattered first by the sound of the animal, then by a pencil dropping onto a wooden desk. The pencil’s appalled owner stomped to his only roommate’s door, nearly tearing his own door off its hinges on the way.

BANG! BANG! BANG! “Open up! What on earth, Jack?! We just talked about this yesterday! You know I’m deathly allergic to cats! If it’s not a dog, it needs to get out!” Though Jack was disturbed by this behavior that he had never experienced from his roommate before, Jack stayed put behind his door.

“Hey, it’s not what it sounds like, Joe,” he offered in an attempt for peace. “I can’t open the door – it’s a surprise.” Any further explanation was drowned out by Joe’s enraged and desperate struggle with the doorknob. Suddenly, the door stopped trembling, and a few moments later, Joe stomped his way out of the dormitory and slammed the front door so hard that the neighbors’ lights came on one by one, soon fully illuminating the pitch-darkness.

Did someone just get robbed? What’s going on? The residents whispered among themselves as they observed their neighbor storm angrily towards them.

“It’s Jack,” Joe yelled at a level that frightened his half-awake neighbors. “That fool just had to bring in a cat even though he agreed not to! Come help me talk some sense into this guy, will you?” The now fully alert neighbors looked at each other, exchanged smirks secretly, and agreed to follow the young man into his dormitory.

Standing in the middle of the living room upon entering was none other than his roommate Jack with a small, gift-wrapped box on the floor. “Surprise!” everyone exclaimed at a bewildered Joe. Jack opened the box and pulled out an adorable puppy, which he placed in his roommate’s arms.

“Wait, what? Well, thank you,” Joe said.

“I’ve always wanted a dog like this. But what about the cat?”

“Why, you’re holding it right now!” Jack exclaimed.

Meow!



“Perfect Enough”

By: Rey Rodriguez - Vasquez

According to gitnux.org, in the United States, a total of twenty percent of households are one-child families. My household forms part of that, personally, almost aggravating number. The dynamic of my life has been unfathomable to everyone around me. Additionally, the idea of built-in “best friends” into one’s life is something that I, until this day, unbelievably yearn for. Although the lack of a brother or sister haunted my childhood and relationship with my parents, it has absolutely strengthened my ability to look at those around me through a lens of love and appreciation.

During the years of my upbringing, a great deal of the conversations with my parents consisted of me “lawyering up” in defense of the existence of a smaller sibling that I felt only seized to exist because of my parents’ selfishness. All these arguments were rooted in my inability to understand the satisfaction I brought to my parents’ idea of a “family.” After sixteen long years of failed pregnancies, a passive-aggressive six-year-old met the requirements for their happiness perfectly. During the rest of my middle school life, and even now, I resent those who complained about their younger sibling’s constant pestering. Additionally, I heard and accepted comments that solidified my inability to understand a “normal life.” Classmates stated that it was hard for me to understand demanding situations or their humor simply because I was chosen for this wicked and lonely fate. The idea of a “perfect family” even appeared in my dreams. In the dream, I woke up to see my little brother, that looked remarkably like a younger me, being ripped from both the red swing I pushed him on in my slumber and my real last miscarriage before storm” baby came sister, would be a driving home from She would even invite school, paying with salary provided by the My partner-in-crime this essay for me English and history just like me.

Although this confusion, anger, and to look at everyone them as I would a pretending that my my sister whenever hangouts. Similarly, angry whenever my best friend, Anna’s boyfriend, says anything borderline offensive, unintentionally participating in the older brother-and-younger sister dynamic I so deeply long for. “Valeria and I both love drawing and anything artistic; we are so different from our parents,” I ponder in wonder. The idea that I was created an only child was proven false by the love that I and this group of girls shared. The cliché idea of a “brother from another mother” grew to life in my human experience because of my relationship with these three girls. Because of them, I now treat those around me with the tenderness yet comedic value I imagine a brother embodies. Although my mindset is something that I keep a secret, I hope that those surrounding me notice it. I aspire to make them notice the way I hold their doors open or the way I rub their backs during hugs.

Throughout the years, I reacted with bitterness in my heart directed at everyone around me and turned it into an outlet for love and care. The hardship and the unreasonable label of loneliness I established upon myself made me miserable. However, in the end, that same desire fueled my newly established attitude. I live my life looking at everyone through a pair of glasses that allow me to simply pretend. The process of pretending allowed me to understand that my fantasies were close to my reality. Valeria, Anna, and Fernanda might as well be considered my sisters. Although I may never utterly understand the bond that two people born from the same mother share, I sure am close. Alongside my parents, the unique family dynamic that has been granted to me is perfect enough for me to my satisfaction and delight.



life. My mother had one her “rainbow after the along. Kamila, my older year older than me and school this afternoon. me for a coffee after her minimum wage local smoothie joint. would even proofread because she is gifted in but does not get math,

process filled me with sadness, it allowed me around me and love sibling. I catch myself best friend Fernanda is er I give her rides to I pretend that I’m extra

I pretend that I’m extra angry whenever my best friend, Anna’s boyfriend, says anything borderline offensive, unintentionally participating in the older brother-and-younger sister dynamic I so deeply long for. “Valeria and I both love drawing and anything artistic; we are so different from our parents,” I ponder in wonder. The idea that I was created an only child was proven false by the love that I and this group of girls shared. The cliché idea of a “brother from another mother” grew to life in my human experience because of my relationship with these three girls. Because of them, I now treat those around me with the tenderness yet comedic value I imagine a brother embodies. Although my mindset is something that I keep a secret, I hope that those surrounding me notice it. I aspire to make them notice the way I hold their doors open or the way I rub their backs during hugs.



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