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NEWS BRIEFS

## New Beauty Clinic Opens Up in Los Fresnos

By Mike Villarreal



There is a new business in Los Fresnos called Smooth Skin Solutions, founded by a proud resident and high school graduate of Los Fresnos. The owner, Sandra Garcia, is a dedicated registered nurse who is committed to providing top-notch treatments, specializing in weight loss solutions. Smooth Skin Solutions is a premier beauty clinic that offers advanced aesthetic treatments and personalized care. Sandra is passionate about enhancing natural beauty and helping clients feel confident and comfortable in their own skin.

Her mission is to empower individuals to look and feel their best by offering innovative, personalized, and effective beauty treatments, IV hydration, vitamin boosters, and weight loss assistance. Smooth Skin Solutions focuses on fostering a healthier lifestyle that is accessible to all walks of life, not just aesthetics. With a passion for wellness and a heart for the community, Sandra wants everyone to know that healthy goals can be affordable and attainable.

Smooth Skin Solutions offers a range of services, including skin care consultations, smart tox (Xeomin, Botox, Dysport), fillers (Revanesse, Juvederm), microneedling, derma planning, laser services with consultation, and

laser tattoo removal. Sandra would like to welcome the community to support this hometown entrepreneur as she begins her journey towards helping our community's health and wellness for all. Make sure to follow

Smooth Skin Solutions for updates, promotions, and wellness tips. The clinic is located at 324 W. Ocean Blvd. Ste. and their contact number is (956) 640-8553. Information and photos by the City of Los Fresnos Facebook page

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## Se abre nueva clínica de belleza en Los Fresnos

Hay un nuevo negocio en Los Fresnos llamado

Smooth Skin Solutions, fundado por un orgulloso

residente y graduado de la escuela secundaria de Los Fresnos. La propietaria, Sandra García, es una enfermera registrada dedicada que se compromete a brindar tratamientos de primer nivel, especializándose en soluciones para perder peso. Smooth Skin Solutions es una clínica de belleza de primer nivel que ofrece tratamientos estéticos avanzados y atención personalizada. A Sandra le apasiona realzar la belleza natural y ayudar a los clientes a sentirse seguros y cómodos en su propia piel.

personalizados y efectivos, hidratación intravenosa, refuerzos vitamínicos y asistencia para perder peso. Smooth Skin Solutions se enfoca en fomentar un estilo de vida más saludable que sea accesible para todos los ámbitos de la vida, no solo para la estética. Con una pasión por el bienestar y un corazón para la comunidad, Sandra quiere que todos sepan que las metas saludables pueden ser asequibles y alcanzables.

de la dermis, servicios de láser con consulta y eliminación de tatuajes con láser. A Sandra le gustaría dar la bienvenida a la comunidad para que apoye a esta empresaria local mientras comienza su viaje para ayudar a la salud y el bienestar de nuestra comunidad para todos. Asegúrese de seguir Smooth Skin Solutions para obtener actualizaciones, promociones y consejos de bienestar. La clínica está ubicada en 324 W. Ocean Blvd. Ste. y su número de contacto es (956) 640-8553.



Smooth Skin Solutions ofrece una gama de servicios, que incluyen consultas sobre el cuidado de la piel, toxina inteligente (Xeomin, Botox, Dysport), rellenos (Revanesse, Juvederm), microagujas, planificación

Smooth Skin Solutions ofrece una gama de servicios, que incluyen consultas sobre el cuidado de la piel, toxina inteligente (Xeomin, Botox, Dysport), rellenos (Revanesse, Juvederm), microagujas, planificación

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# What Families With College-Bound Students Need to Know This Spring



### StatePoint

Perhaps even more nerve-racking than waiting for your child's college acceptance letters is learning whether they've been awarded financial aid. Recent changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) designed to simplify the process have led to unforeseen hiccups and technical glitches, causing academic institutions to delay sending out financial aid award letters. However, once you finally get the results, it can give your

family a better idea of what to do next.

"Our research shows that for a majority of parents, figuring out how to pay for college was the 'road to college' activity that caused them the most stress. By making a financial plan and prioritizing it, you can be well prepared to avoid the most common bumps in the road," explains Angela Colatriano, chief marketing officer, College Ave.

Colatriano recommends using the spring to teach your child these valuable financial skills: how to set

up a budget, how to pay bills and how to manage credit. If your family will potentially be borrowing to finance college, students should also gain an understanding of how loans work, and how the different terms of the loan will affect their monthly payments and overall loan cost.

Speaking of budget, you should set a realistic budget for yourself. A recent College Ave survey found that in addition to helping pay for tuition and housing costs, parents also contribute to their child's phone bill (65%), health

insurance (61%), food and groceries (42%), cable and internet bill (35%) and transportation (32%). Be realistic about which expenses you can afford and where you want to ask your child to chip in.

### Decode Award Letters

Financial aid award letters can look different for each school. Familiarize yourself with their components so that when they arrive, you'll be ready to decipher them. Here's what to look for:

**1. Free money:** The award letter will list

whether your student is eligible for scholarships and grants (sometimes called Merit or Gift Aid). This is money you typically don't need to pay back.

### 2. Federal Work-Study:

Your child might be eligible for Federal Work-Study jobs. While jobs aren't guaranteed, they can be a good opportunity to help cover educational expenses.

### 3. Student Loans:

Schools will list any federal loans your child is eligible to receive. Helpful hint: They may be grouped with scholarships and grants. You should also note whether the loan is subsidized or unsubsidized. Because unsubsidized loans accrue interest while your student is enrolled and during deferment periods, this will affect the overall loan cost.

**4. Other factors:** Check if awards being offered are for all four years and understand what your child will need to do to continue being eligible for them, year-to-year.

To get an apples-to-apples look at the offers, calculate the net direct cost of each school by subtracting offered scholarships and grants from the cost of attendance (tuition, room, board,

textbooks and fees). If applicable, you can subtract work-study aid too. You should also factor in expected increases in tuition, room, board and other fees.

### Fill in the Gaps

If after doing the math, you find you have a financial gap to cover, look into private scholarships. One easy one to enter on a monthly basis is College Ave's \$1,000 Scholarship Monthly Sweepstakes.

You may also want to consider a private student loan or parent loan. Look for a lender with great rates, flexible repayment terms, and the opportunity to customize the loan to fit your budget. For example, College Ave offers student loan calculators, a pre-qualification tool that offers quick answers without affecting your credit score, and other helpful tools and resources. To learn more, visit CollegeAve.com.

"The important thing is not to panic. If you filled out the FAFSA, financial aid award letters are on the way. And once you receive them, you and your student can get to the fun part of planning for the future," says Colatriano.



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# LOS FRESNOS SPORTS

## 2024 LOS FRESNOS FALCONS Varsity Baseball Schedule

DATE	DAY	OPPONENT	PLACE	TIME
<b>FEBRUARY</b>				
3	Sat	PSJA#	Away	11:00
5	Mon	Palmview #	Home	6:00
9	Fri	Port Isabel #	Away	5:00
12	Mon	Pioneer #	Away	6:00
16	Fri	Weslaco East #	Home	5:30
19	Mon	Palmview	Home	6:00
22-24	Thu-Sat	LF/PI Tournament		TBA
26	Mon	Edinburg North	Home	6:00
<b>MARCH</b>				
29-2	Thu-Sat	Mira's Tournament	Away	TBA
5	Tue	Edinburg Economedes	Away	5:30
7-9	Thu-Sat	El Campo Tournament	Away	TBA
11	Mon	Edinburg	Home	11:00
13	Wed	La Joya	Away	11:00
19	Tue	PSJA	Home	6:30
22	Fri	Mission	Away	6:30
26	Tue	Rivera*	Home	6:30
28	Thu	Rivera*	Away	6:30
<b>APRIL</b>				
2	Tue	Weslaco*	Home	6:30
5	Fri	Weslaco*	Away	6:30
9	Tue	Hanna*	Away	6:30
12	Fri	Hanna*	Home	6:30
16	Tue	San Benito*	Home	6:30
19	Fri	San Benito*	Away	6:30
23	Tue	Harlingen*	Away	6:30
26	Fri	Harlingen*	Home	6:30

## Falcons sit atop the district standings

By Ruben Rodriguez  
Los Fresnos News

In the past three seasons, the Los Fresnos Falcons Baseball team has earned a reputation for being one of the top teams in the Rio Grande Valley. From reaching the 6A Region Four Finals in 2021, to back-to-back undefeated district championships in 2022 and 2023, The Falcons have certainly made a name for themselves. In 2024, the trend of dominance looks to be continuing so far as Los Fresnos sits at 3-0 to begin District 32-6A.

To open up district play, Los Fresnos took on Brownsville Rivera. Despite being 4-0 in their last four meetings against Brownsville Rivera, this has become quite the rivalry between the Raiders and Falcons. Last season, the Falcons and

Raiders clashed in two close matchups, including a 10-inning game in last season's 32-6A opener. This season, the Falcons were once again able to defeat the Raiders with a 1-0 win after a scoreless game the majority of the night. In game two, the Falcons once again defeated Brownsville Rivera, this time in a high scoring game. A combined 12-run shootout saw Los Fresnos sweep the Raiders in the series with a 7-5 victory.

Now on the slate were the Weslaco Panthers. Arguably Los Fresnos' biggest rival in District, the Panthers and Falcons have been the top dogs of the district. In the 2022 regular season, the Falcons and Panthers were battling for the 32-6A crown, as both teams were unbeaten all season. The stars aligned perfectly as the Los Fresnos

and Weslaco Series was the final series of the regular season in 2022. Ever since then, both teams have battled with Los Fresnos on the winning end of the last four meetings.

Los Fresnos took control early with a two run first inning and never looked back. The game would remain scoreless as defense was the theme of the matchup. The Falcons would eventually tack on a third run in the fourth before Weslaco would respond with their first and only run of the night in the fifth. Los Fresnos would pick up the win 7-5.

Los Fresnos will finish out the series with Weslaco before turning their attention to Brownsville Hanna and San Benito as they continue on their journey for a three-peat in District.

## Los Fresnos Varsity Softball Schedule 2024

Date	Opponent	Site	Time
JAN 27	PSJA HIGH (S)	AWAY	11AM
JAN 30	BRO. LOPEZ(S)	AWAY	6PM
Feb 2	SHARYLAND PIONEER (S)	HOME	630PM
Feb 6	HARLINGEN SOUTH(S)	AWAY	6PM
Feb 10	MERCEDES/PSJA N/LYFORD (S)	AWAY	TBD
Feb 13	LYFORD	HOME	6PM
Feb 15-17	PSJA ISD TOURNAMENT	AWAY	TBD
Feb 20	MISSION	HOME	630PM
FEB 22-24	SA SOUTHWEST TOURNEY	AWAY	TBD
FEB 27	CC MOODY	HOME	5:30PM
FEB 29,MAR 1-2	MIRA'S TOURNAMENT	AWAY	TBD
MAR 5	EDINBURG	AWAY	6:30PM
MAR 8	RIO HONDO	AWAY	7PM
MAR 11	CC INCARNATE WORD	HOME	11AM
MAR 14	RIVERA*	HOME	1PM
MAR 19	WESLACO*	HOME	630PM
MAR 22	HANNA*	AWAY	630PM
MAR 26	SAN BENITO*	HOME	630PM
MAR 28	HARLINGEN*	AWAY	630PM
APR 2	RIVERA*	AWAY	630PM
APR 4	WESLACO*	AWAY	630PM
APR 9	HANNA*	HOME	630PM
APR 12	SAN BENITO*	AWAY	630PM
APR 16	HARLINGEN*	HOME	630PM

\*District Games



## Lady Falcons season comes to an end

By Ruben Rodriguez  
Los Fresnos News

After a strong regular season, the Los Fresnos Lady Falcons Soccer team began the 6A playoffs with a bang. Los Fresnos was able to capture the Bi-District Title with a big 6-0 win over the Economedes Lady Jaguars. The Lady Falcons now looked to turn their attention to the San Antonio Taft Lady Raiders in the Area Round. The Lady Falcons and Lady Raiders are no strangers to each other as both schools met in the 2023 Area Round where Taft picked

up a 3-0 win to advance to the Regional Quarterfinal. The First half saw Taft take control right away thanks to an explosive offense that knocked in three goals. The Lady Falcons were able to net in a goal to make it 3-1 at the half. Taft would continue their dominance in the second half as Taft would knock in two more goals. The defense for the Lady Raiders came out to play as well, effectively shutting down the Lady Falcons to scoreless second half. Taft would hold on and pick up the 5-1 win over Los Fresnos.

For the second straight season, the Lady Falcons have their season ended by San Antonio Taft. For the third consecutive season, Los Fresnos' season ends to a San Antonio Team in the Area Round of the 6A Girls Soccer State playoffs.

The Lady Falcons finish their season with an overall record of 13-9 and a District Record of 7-3. Truly a great season for the Lady Falcons, who will now turn their attention to the offseason as the road to the 2024-25 Season begins in the summer and fall.



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# Lady Falcons are Class 6A Champions



Fresnos has also been instrumental in backing and supporting the Lady Falcons, which has been a crucial factor in their success.

The hard work and dedication of all the girls are truly remarkable, and they should be incredibly proud of their accomplishments. Winning year after year for a decade is an exceptional feat, and it highlights that hard work truly pays off.

Photo and information from Los Fresnos CISD Facebook Page

By Mike Villarreal

The Los Fresnos Lady Falcons have won the Texas High School Women's Powerlifting Association Class 6A

State Championship for the ninth consecutive year. As a team, they scored 30 points, with three first-place finishes, one third-place finish, two fourth-place finishes,

and two fifth-place medals.

The Lady Falcons have now won a total of nine state championships, leaving no doubt that they are the number one

powerlifting team in their division. Their program is just one championship away from having a ring for each finger on both hands, which is an incredible achievement.

This continued tradition of excellence is a testament to the great coaches and assistants who work together to support the team. The community of Los

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Fill in the blank squares in the grid, making sure that every row, column and 3-by-3 box includes all digits 1 through 9.

**LAST WEEK'S SUDOKU ANSWERS**

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

**LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORDS ANSWERS**

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THEME: EUROPEAN CAPITALS

**ACROSS**

1. Parting words  
6. Broadcasting acronym  
9. Taj Mahal city  
13. Ernest, to mommy  
14. "Fat chance!"  
15. Fits of shivering  
16. Rundown  
17. Historical period

18. "\_\_\_\_ its weight in gold"  
19. \*Namesake of famous pact signed in 1955  
21. \*"The City of a Hundred Spires"  
23. Financial assistance  
24. Bird's groomer  
25. Pod nugget  
28. Fountain order  
30. Duck dish a certain way

35. Picture on a coat  
37. Feline vibration  
39. Sticking fiber  
40. Cockeyam, pl.  
43. Pelvic bones  
44. Frost over (2 words)  
46. Stew bean  
47. Sleeveless garment  
48. Predicament  
50. Snakelike fish  
52. Hi-\_\_\_\_ monitor  
53. Toothy wheel  
55. \*Street, in capital

- city in #38 Down
- 57. \*On the Danube
  - 60. \*On the Thames
  - 63. Virtue, in Italian
  - 64. \*Street, in capital city in #25 Down
  - 66. Dashboard instruments
  - 68. Beside, archaic
  - 69. Geological Society of America
  - 70. Type of heron
  - 71. Parks or Luxemburg
  - 72. Pecking mother
  - 73. Like oboe's sound

- DOWN**
- 1. "\_\_\_\_ the land of the free ..."
  - 2. Cold one
  - 3. Peruvian Empire
  - 4. Miss America topper
  - 5. Blood infection
  - 6. Prepare to swallow
  - 7. \*Dublin's cultural quarter neighborhood, "Temple \_\_\_\_"
  - 8. Parallelogram, e.g.
  - 9. All excited
  - 10. Spiritual leader
  - 11. Network of nerves
  - 12. Certain something in a tray
  - 15. Rouse
  - 20. Take puppy from a pound
  - 22. "Hamilton: An American Musical" singing style
  - 24. Great \_\_\_\_ Reef
  - 25. \*On the Seine
  - 26. Not slouching
  - 27. Arabian chieftain
  - 29. Like Roman god Janus
  - 31. \*Also the most populous city in Ukraine
  - 32. More ill
  - 33. Neil Diamond's "Beautiful \_\_\_\_"
  - 34. Annoying tiny biters
  - 36. Arctic jaeger
  - 38. \*Located in boot-shaped country
  - 42. Sound of artillery
  - 45. Kind of hickory nut
  - 49. Jack's inferior
  - 51. Like a Grammy nominee
  - 54. Frustration, in print
  - 56. "A bird in hand is worth two in the bush," e.g.
  - 57. Source of veritas
  - 58. Wraths
  - 59. Volcano in Sicily
  - 60. Ground beef description
  - 61. Fairytale giant
  - 62. "All You \_\_\_\_ Is Love"
  - 63. Variable, abbr.
  - 65. Put to work
  - 67. Hog heaven



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# 5 Smart Home Products for The Modern Home

**StatePoint**

As you navigate the demands of modern life, it's empowering to know that your living spaces can keep up. Here are five smart home technologies that can help you take control and elevate your home into a sanctuary of modern convenience and elegance.

**1. Ovens:** With a smart oven, you may be able to limit the incidence of traditional kitchen snafus. For example, the Sharp Smart Convection Wall Oven with Microwave Drawer Oven (SWB3085HS), a combination appliance, features a single simple-to-use, full-color touchscreen control panel. It Works with Alexa to accept voice commands. (Alexa-compatible device sold separately.) You can turn the oven

on and off hands-free, keeping the control panel clean. This model is an excellent example of what technological innovation can bring to home cooking—allowing you to choose settings based on popular foods and recipes and giving you the ability to save up to 30 of your favorite menu items and cook times for easier access. Whether you're a seasoned chef or just starting your culinary journey, a highly functional smart oven can be a game changer in your kitchen.

**2. Dishwashers:** Who doesn't love extra help in the kitchen, especially when it comes to cleaning? A smart dishwasher can simplify daily chores. Many smart models can be operated and monitored remotely from your smartphone, so you can receive

notifications when the cycle is complete or customize wash settings with the touch of a button to keep cleanup moving along while getting on with other activities. For a modern, eco-friendly kitchen, prioritize energy-efficient features and advanced cleaning technology.

**3. Air purifiers:** Create a mindful living environment with a Smart Air Purifier like the Plasmacluster 7000 Series KCP110UW Smart Air Purifier and Humidifier by Sharp, which is compatible with Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant to allow voice control. (Assistant devices sold separately.) Monitor your home's air quality, adjust settings remotely, and even receive notifications when it's time to replace your air purifier's filters using

the SHARP AIR app.

**4. Microwaves:** Today's smart microwave ovens are available in countertop, over-the-range and even Microwave Drawer ovens, which can be installed under the counter or in an island to complement your lifestyle. Simple voice commands like "Alexa, microwave frozen veggies" or "Alexa, defrost 1 pound of ground meat" can revolutionize how you spend your time in the kitchen.

**5. Televisions:** Thanks to smart televisions, you can elevate your binge-watching sessions and truly immerse yourself in stunning visuals, vibrant colors and seamless streaming experiences from the comfort of your home. Use your voice to find shows, play music, and control smart home devices with a Sharp

AQUOS XLED 4K Ultra HD Mini LED Google TV. With personalized watchlists and profiles, everyone's experience can be customized for them. Another option is a Sharp Roku TV OLED 4K Ultra HD television, which works with popular voice assistants, making it a perfect fit for any smart home.

"Embracing the future of smart living can save you time, energy and hassle. From the kitchen to the living room, let smart devices seamlessly integrate into your daily routine," says Peter Weedfald, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Sharp Home Electronics Company of America.



# Three reasons to volunteer with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Statewide volunteer programs offer a vibrant community of individuals looking to give back



Master Naturalist works to develop volunteers to be dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources. (Michael Miller/Texas A&M AgriLife)

Every day, volunteers from all walks of life step up to give back to the people, land and natural resources across Texas through the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Boasting a robust volunteer network bringing together nearly 83,500 people from across the state, AgriLife Extension offers a variety of opportunities to become engaged with your local community through volunteering in ways meaningful to both yourself and your surrounding community.

"Our volunteers are the backbone of AgriLife Extension's mission," said Courtney Dodd, Ph.D., AgriLife Extension associate director for health, youth and families. "Because of them, we are able to connect in even more meaningful, impactful ways with our communities. They are a critical part to our agency, and we could not be more in awe of their passion and selfless service to the state of Texas."

AgriLife Extension offers four statewide programs that utilize volunteers — Texas Master Gardeners,

Texas Master Naturalists, Texas Master Wellness and Texas 4-H Youth Development. These programs and others provide a multitude of unique opportunities for those looking to give back given the agency's wealth of partnerships and programs.

"We have so many opportunities to volunteer that you can really find one aligned with your personal passions and interests," Dodd said. "We want our volunteers to be able to build their own experience based on their interests."

## Reasons to volunteer with AgriLife Extension Become a 'master' while you give back

Master volunteers are local people in a community interested in a specific topic and a desire to serve others. These AgriLife Extension volunteer programs provide training to increase their knowledge and skills in their program of choice. After volunteers complete the training for the program of their choosing, they are allowed to teach youth or adults, train other volunteers, or work on projects within their

community.

## Immerse yourself in an opportunity perfect for you

After completing training for a program, you can continue learning while aligning your volunteer efforts with your interests. The wide range of AgriLife Extension programs offer everything from aligning healthy eating, youth development, environment stewardship and more.

## Find a community of like-minded individuals in your area

Volunteers have an advantage in creating a community within their program whenever partners and other professionals are invited for workshops. They are encouraged to socialize, ask questions and form friendships with like-minded individuals. Building their network and establishing a community within the program allows volunteers to work together to create more opportunities inside and outside their program.

To find out more about the volunteer opportunities in your area, contact your local county AgriLife Extension office.



Texas Master Gardener volunteers are trained to provide horticultural-related information within their communities. (Laura McKenzie/Texas A&M AgriLife)



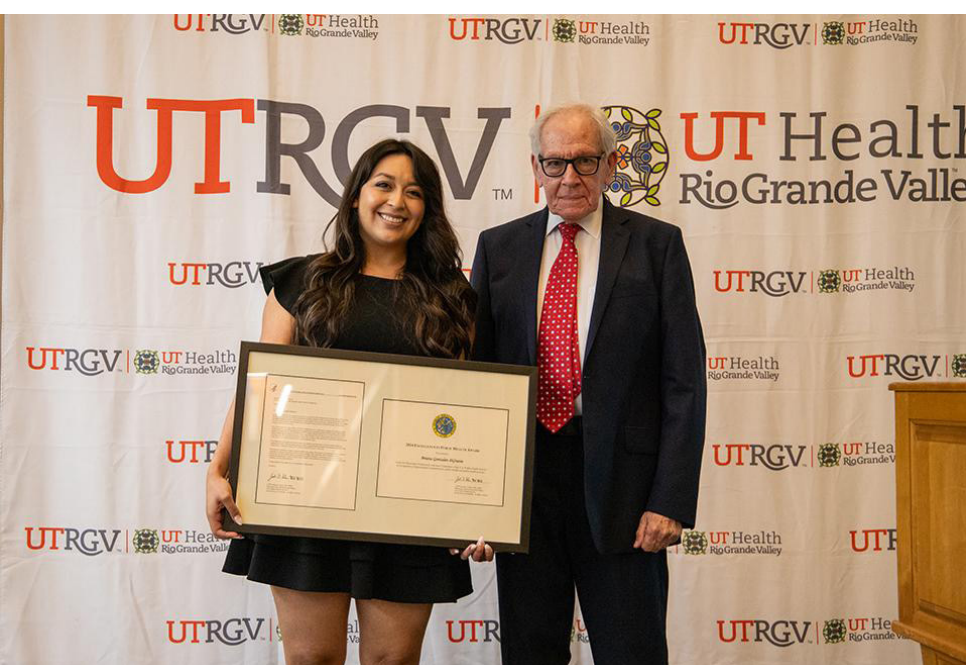
Texas 4-H volunteers serve in a variety of roles to help create success for the Texas 4-H program. (Texas A&M AgriLife)



Master Wellness volunteers complete training related to health, nutrition, food safety and other topics. (Courtesy photo)



# Valley Native And UTRGV Medical Student Earns National Health Recognition



*UTRGV School of Medicine student Briana Gonzalez DiGrazia was nationally recognized by the U.S. Public Health Service with the Excellence in Public Health Award. The award recognizes visionary medical students who are advancing initiatives to improve public health and addressing public health issues in their community. Dr. Stanley Fisch, professor of Pediatrics at the UTRGV School of Medicine, recently presented Gonzalez DiGrazia with the honor at the SGA (Student Government Association) Student and Faculty Appreciation Ceremony. (UTRGV Photo by Heriberto Perez-Zuniga)*

**By Heriberto Perez-Zuniga**

RIO GRANDE VALLEY, TEXAS – APRIL 2, 2024 – Briana Gonzalez DiGrazia knew she wanted to be in medicine from a young age. Looking back, she fondly remembers dinner conversations with her parents about their experiences in healthcare. "My mom worked as a nurse, and my dad was a respiratory therapist, so the best part of dinner was listening to them talk about their day," said Gonzalez DiGrazia. "I saw how hard they worked to care for their patients, but I also saw how rewarding their job was." Now in her second year as a UTRGV School of Medicine student, Gonzalez DiGrazia has received recognition for her exemplary dedication to healthcare.

She earned the prestigious U.S. Public Health Service 2024 Excellence in Public Health Award, recognizing medical students who demonstrate leadership in advancing initiatives to enhance public health and address prevalent health issues within their communities.

The award is a national recognition given to medical students who have shown a commitment to public health and equity during their studies.

### COMMUNITY IMPACT

Growing up in McAllen in the Rio Grande Valley, where a large portion of the population is affected by diabetes and hypertension, Gonzalez DiGrazia saw firsthand just how a person's environment can affect their health.

In the Valley, where

a large portion of those affected remain uninsured, healthcare access and treatment options remain out of reach for many.

Determined to impact her community, Gonzalez DiGrazia worked to understand and bring solutions to these issues.

"I developed a research and interdisciplinary educational initiative with the Texas Medical Association and the Area Health Education (AHEC) Scholars Program," she said. "We worked to provide uninsured patients with hypertension with a free blood pressure cuff and education in the hopes of preventing future cardiovascular events like strokes."

### A PERSONAL MISSION

These efforts were a personal mission for Gonzalez DiGrazia, whose family struggled

with limited access to healthcare.

"My grandfather passed away suddenly from a stroke in his 40s, and at the time, my mom lived in a rural part of Mexico where the nearest hospital was hours away," she said. "My father and his family also worked in the fields as migrant workers after immigrating to the US, so going to the doctor wasn't always an option."

Being a Valley native and her family background profoundly influenced her medical journey.

Those factors gave her an understanding of the healthcare challenges faced by many in the region, fueling her determination to effect positive change in healthcare access in South Texas.

"We need to ensure our patients have access to primary care services so they can be aware of any health conditions and work with their providers

to monitor these before it becomes an emergency," said Gonzalez DiGrazia. "This is something that the UTRGV School of Medicine has done through the AHEC clinics, and I'm grateful to be a part of that, even as a student."

### FUTURE HEALTHCARE LEADERS

Dr. Maurice Clifton, senior associate dean of Student Affairs and Admissions at the UTRGV School of Medicine, said Gonzalez DiGrazia is a prime example of the future healthcare leaders being produced at the academic medical institution.

"Briana exemplifies the values of compassion, dedication, and excellence that we strive to instill in our students," he said. "Her commitment to addressing healthcare issues in our community is commendable, and we are

immensely proud of her." Gonzalez DiGrazia said she's proud to have received such a prestigious award and is grateful for the experience and support from the UTRGV School of Medicine.

"There was a time when I didn't think I would be able to attend medical school, especially since it's so competitive and was far from home," she said.

Despite this, she encourages other Valley students to pursue a medical career and utilize the resources now found at "home" through the UTRGV School of Medicine.

"I know how difficult the path to becoming a physician is, but I encourage other students from the Valley to stay persistent and keep working hard," she said. "Our patients need more physicians who understand them and can meet the specific needs of the Valley."



*In conjunction with the Texas Medical Association and Area Health Education (AHEC) Scholars Program, Briana Gonzalez DiGrazia, UTRGV School of Medicine student, developed a research and education initiative to spread hypertension and cardiovascular disease awareness within the community. Through the program, uninsured patients received a free blood pressure cuff and education in the hopes of preventing future cardiovascular events like strokes. (UTRGV Photo)*

# Expert Landscaping Tips for Choosing and Installing Plants

**StatePoint**

The perfect landscape may start with a healthy, lush lawn, but for interest and depth, you'll also need to consider the plants that surround it. Thankfully, it's easy to make considerable improvements to your backyard life using tips from professionals. Landscape designer Doug Scott has partnered with lawn care equipment manufacturer Exmark, to offer these tips for selecting and installing plants that will beautify your outdoor living areas.

### Choosing Plants

Choose plants well-suited for your specific growing conditions. Knowing your growing zone is important, however you should also be mindful how conditions like sun exposure can change as you move around your

yard.

- Choose the right size plants for the space. Bear in mind that what you're planting today is much smaller than what it will be once it's matured. Always read a plant's care label to understand its optimal growing conditions and size at maturity.

- From a design perspective, think in terms of texture, layers and drifts. When addressing the overall texture of your planting beds, choose plants that vary in form, size, color and leaf structure. This will create greater interest, and a space that's more visually appealing and enjoyable to spend time in.

For a lush look, think in terms of layers when considering composition. Much like in a painting, you should have background, middle ground, and foreground

layers. Your background layer should consist of taller evergreen shrubs to provide something alive and green to look at all year long, no matter what's happening in front of them. Your middle ground layer should be lower than the background layer to create interest, and is where you can add a contrasting evergreen shrub or pop of color with a perennial plant. Finally, your foreground layer should help transition the planting beds to your lawn space. You can accomplish this with smaller perennials, evergreens, annuals or creeping ground covers.

When addressing drifts, read the plant labels to know how large they'll grow. This can help ensure plants grow in together as they mature, but are not overcrowded.

### Installing Them



1. Dig a hole that's about two times the diameter of the pot your plant's being transplanted from, and about the depth of the pot.
2. Mend in compost or soil conditioner to give your plant the organic material it needs to thrive. If you'd like, add slow-release fertilizer, and mix well.
3. Place your plant in the hole, making sure that it sits at, or just above, the level it did in the pot.
4. Backfill with soil,

- stopping to add water when the hole is about halfway full.
5. Fill the rest of the hole with soil, then firmly press down.
6. Soak your plant with more water.
7. Finish by adding mulch, making sure it's pulled away from the base of your plant.

Scott offers more insights in "How to Choose Plants for Landscaping," a recent episode of "Done-in-a-Weekend Projects,"

an original series from Exmark. To watch the video, visit Backyard Life, which is part of a unique multimedia destination with a focus on helping homeowners make the most of outdoor spaces.

"Now that you have the inspiration and know-how needed to choose and install plant material, you can create landscaping that reflects who you are and how you'd like to live outside," says Scott.