

The City of Elsa

Volume 1 Issue 1 © Elsa, TX

March 2000



Elsa's City Council consists of Pete Riojas, Felipe Balli, Mayor Gregorio Madrigal, Mingo Rodriguez, and Senovio Castillo.

To: Citizens of Elsa

From: Gregorio Madrigal,
Mayor of Elsa

Thank you for picking up a copy of our newsletter. I hope you read it thoroughly and enjoy it. The City Council, the City Manager, 4A and 4B committee members, and I all supported the idea of publishing a newsletter because we have a need to communicate with our residents about ongoing projects and other community news.

On behalf of our councilmen Pete Riojas, Felipe Balli, Mingo Rodriguez, and Senovio Castillo, I

would like to describe some of the projects we have undertaken.

About two years ago, the City began work on sewer improvements between Mile 6 and FM 88 along Highway 107. Other infrastructure work was done the following year when we renovated lift stations in the city. Similarly, the City repaved Ciro Caceres Street between FM 88 and Yellowjacket Drive.

Along the way, we have also hired four police officers through federal government grants. Last year, we bought two new police cars as well as maintenance trucks for the sewer plants. The City has also hired a full-

time groundskeeper to work on city parks, and we have invested in landscaping city hall and the library. We are proud of the collaborative effort to renovate our library, as an enclosed article describes.

In the near future, the City plans more street improvements. We have done much infrastructure work and plan to continue even more. We expect to continue collaborating with the County, with state and federal agencies, and with many of our residents. We must keep working together for the betterment of Elsa.

City's Economic Initiative Focuses on Industrial Park

As part of its aggressive economic development initiative, the City of Elsa obtained a \$717,000 grant from the federal government's Economic Development Administration for the construction of a 62-acre Industrial Park.

The new park will provide new businesses the appropriate facilities for commercial use.

"An Industrial Park is important to the city because we currently do not

have any place to house businesses that are eager to move into Elsa," said Senovio Castillo, 4A advisory committee chairman for the city.

The park, which will be located at the Southeast corner of Farm-to-Market Road 88 and Monte Cristo Road, is expected to bring at least 150 new jobs to the area.

"This is the most cost effective site for the Industrial Park given its close proximity to the City's sewer

plant and its easy access to 281 West and 77 East," Castillo said.

According to Petra Reyna of Reyna and Associates, a firm hired by the City to lead its economic development efforts, "the grant money will be used to extend the city's current infrastructure that includes water and sewer lines."

The city was also approved for a \$400,000 grant from the United

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From the Desk of the City Manager

The City of Elsa is moving forward with giant steps not only to improve the image of the city but to improve the quality of life for all its residents.

The first step in this endeavor is the creation of this newsletter. City Council is committed to stay in touch with those they represent. This newsletter allows Council members an opportunity to inform citizens of important events happening in the city.

In the past 10 months the city has demolished ten dilapidated and substandard homes that were unfit for human habitation. These units were not only a hazard for the community



Elsa City Manager Leonardo Camarillo

but a eyesore to the neighborhood. The City Council is committed to make every resident proud of their city.

In the area of infrastructure, the city has spent \$600,000 to improve all the lift stations as well as water and wastewater facilities. In December of 1999, a major street improvement project was completed. Another \$200,000 street project will be underway by April of this year.

In the area of economic development, major steps have been taken. The city is in the process of purchasing 30 acres of land to develop an industrial park. Four companies have already shown great interest to establish their business and create a good number of jobs.



Elsa Phone Directory

City of Elsa
262-2127

Police Department
262-4721

Fire Department
262-2741

Fire Alarm **ONLY**
262-1414

Elsa Crimestoppers
262-5050

Elsa Public Library
262-3061

E-E I.S.D.
262-2136

E-E High School
262-4731

E-E Junior High
262-5820

E-E Boys & Girls Club
262-1145

Sugar Blues Sewing Plant Expands To Elsa

Fourteen years ago Elvira Grajales began her own sewing company in the family garage. Today she is owner and manager of Sugar Blues, located along Expressway 83 in Pharr.

As you enter this rather small building, the swarming hum of sewing machines escapes the workroom entrance behind a front room filled with racks of plastic-bound blouses designed by Grajales. "Those are the blouses we sell, here, out of the shop," exclaims Grajales, as she walks towards the *humming* room.

Behind the door, 22 men and women work feverishly behind their sewing machines cutting and stitching large cuts of bright orange-yellow nylon.

Several months ago, Sugar Blues was pre-awarded a subcontract by the United States Postal Service for three years to produce 800,000 postal bags each year. Five thousand postal bags must be sewn and packed each day in



A Sugar Blues employee sews a bag for the U.S. Postal Service.

order for the contract to be completed.

"These are the mail bags that the government has contracted us to work on," explains Grajales.

Grajales and her company have committed to expanding their facilities to Elsa with a plan to hire as many as 30 local residents. This agreement follows a plan by the city to expand the local economy.

"We can sew a bag in about twenty minutes," said Olga Zuniga, a

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Library Expansion To Benefit Community

After 20 years, the Elsa Public Library expanded its building and will now have more programs, books, and computers for the community.

“We wanted to get something that would benefit the kids and the entire community,” said Hilda Molina, library director. “Now we have a lot more kids coming in, and we hope to get even more.”

The first library was established in 1974 and was located at Elsa Housing Authority on 309 W. 3rd Street. In 1978, another building was built that was 1,4000 square-feet.

Today, the new library houses a new meeting room for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and Graduate Equivalent Diploma (GED) classes for local residents, a children’s area for storytelling time, movies and arts and crafts activities and a meeting room, library officials said.

City officials and library staff members held a grand opening December 11, 1999, for the 35,000 square-foot facility.



The library expansion was funded by several organizations that contributed a total of \$233,000 in grants. The Meadows Foundation, an organization that assists institutions to improve the quality of life, allocated \$100,000; the 4-A and 4-B City of Elsa advisory committees allocated \$100,000 for the expansion.

Hidalgo County’s Urban County Precinct 1 donated \$25,000, and the Urban County City of Elsa donated \$66,000, library officials said. In addition, the Tucker Foundation donated \$35,00 for furniture. The Llano Grande Center for Research and Development based out of Edcouch-Elsa High School, through a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, also gave \$50,000 to the library for its adult literacy center.

With the new addition, the library will have 14 new computers, and 25,000 books. “We had some of our computers in boxes for two years because we didn’t have the space to install them,” Molina said. “Now we have the computers, and a new meeting room that the public can use.”

Officials are holding library tours every Wednesday morning for the schools and are preparing activities for the Summer Reading Program.

Voices of Elsa

Now That The Elsa Public Library Has Expanded, What New Services Should It Offer?



Rigo Molina
LBJ Custodian

“Computers, where our kids can go and do their homework or whatever they need to do for school.”

Darcy Villarreal
Nurse’s Assistant

“I didn’t know it had expanded, but it should have Internet services.”



Reynaldo Salinas
City Employee

“Computer class and open the library on Sunday...”

Letty Prieto
Head Start
Teacher Assistant

“I think they have enough services such as computers, but I would like a class on the Internet.”



The Founding of Elsa

Before March 2, 1927, they were called tracts.

There was the Liljestrand Tract, the Carlson Tract, the George Tract. That is how newspapers, politicians, and some people referred to areas of land in mid Hidalgo County, where the Elsa Townsite was founded on March 2, 1927.

which owned most of the land sold on auction day, claimed that the name of Elsa carried the day because residents understood the geographical importance of Mexico. The idea was to assign Spanish value to the Townsite.

Elsa, like Edcouch, La Villa, and other neighboring towns, was born in the late 1920's as a direct result of a strong desire to develop the agricultural industry in South Texas. So when the Southern Pacific Railroad track was laid in early 1927, the Elsa Townsite was founded.

The railroad quickly became an important mode of transportation and economic growth for the area.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the town became an agricultural haven. Elsa could boast of a fully employed population during the high unemployment era of the Great Depression of the 1930s. During the 1940s, Elsa was also home to the Vahlsing Packing Shed, which the *Guinness Book of World Records* called the largest packing shed under one roof in the world.

But when the Townsite was auctioned off 73 years ago, it gained a new identity—it gained a new name. There was talk around town at that time about what to name this new municipality. In the end, Elsie George's name would be honored.

"Because Elsie George was an early pioneer of the area, people decided to name the town Elsa," said Neal Galloway, a longtime Elsa resident.

The American Rio Grande and Irrigation Company,

But the boom years could not persist. The freezes of 1949 and 1951, following by the emerging mechanization of labor, and the growing displacement of trains by trucks as the principal mode of transporting crops, profoundly impacted the local economy.

As the city turns 73 this March, we find ourselves with significant economic and other development challenges. While agriculture is still vital, it has become less important to the local economy. The City of Elsa, as are our neigh-

OPENING SALE ELSA The New S.P. Town
At Mile 5 North and 16th West

No Auction Sale—All Lots Tagged and Marked With Price—Select Your Lot, Pull Tag
and TAKE TO OUR OFFICE on the Ground, PAY ONE-FOURTH CASH AND SIGN CONTRACT, Balance Payable 6, 12, 18 Months

MARCH 2ND

Elsa Townsite Company

Prices:
Business Lots, \$850 to \$1200
Residence Lots, \$600 to \$750

Red Tags On Business Lots
White Tags On Residence Lots
Green Tags On Mexican Colony

BUY YOUR LOT IN ELSA A GOOD INVESTMENT





boring communities, is now faced with the dilemma of how to develop itself in the midst of new global and regional economic dynamics informed by technology, information and new sets of skills.

When the railroad was built, Elsa was born. Last year, the railroad was unearthed.

Among the challenges the local leadership is faced with today, is how much of the old economy we should hold onto. To be sure, we have been part of an intensive laboring economy throughout the past century. Will we continue in the old laboring mode, or will we challenge ourselves to build new skills.

“Our people need to understand,” said a local resident recently, “that we too can think for a living, and that we can create a new economy.”

If we meet the challenge, we must then find a way to reinvent ourselves. If so, might we be on the cusp of a local renaissance?

Opposite page: Newspaper advertisement from the Edinburg Valley Review, February 1927.

Top: “The Selling of Elsa” March 2, 1927. Courtesy of William Foerster.

Bottom: Vahlsing Packing Shed in Elsa, 1941. Courtesy of Arcadio Padilla and Ezequiel Granado.



New Building to Provide County Services for Area Residents

Construction on a “one-stop” building in Elsa will soon provide county services for local residents.

The new 10,000 square-foot facility, located on U.S. Highway 107 behind the United States Post Office, will house a clinic, offices for the Women Infant and Children (WIC) Program, a Justice Center, and a community room, officials said.

The new clinic and the WIC Program, which provides vouchers for low-income families, are two of the main services offered to the community. The Justice Center will be used as offices for the Justice of the Peace and the Constable.

Community organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce will be able to hold regular meetings in the new community room, officials said.

“They started building sometime



Work began on the “One-Stop” County building last December. Officials expect completion in mid-April.

in December, and it is expected to be completed sometime in the next 60 days,” said City Manager Leonardo Camarillo. The projected completion date for the new building is April 15,

2000.

“The project is being put together by Commissioner Sylvia Handy, and there should be a ribbon cutting ceremony in May,” Camarillo said.

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4A and 4B Committees Work to Revitalize City

Two important City of Elsa advisory committees have been working diligently on developing an economic development plan for the City of Elsa.

The 4A and 4B committees, chaired by Elsa residents Senovio Castillo and Eloy Garza, respectively.

The 4A committee is comprised of five community members including two city councilmen.

Similarly, 4B is comprised of five community members, including two city councilmen.

“We deal with economic development, and basically we have a say so with the money that comes to the city from the state by way of the sales tax,” Garza said.

The 4A committee holds the responsibilities of industrial development. This includes the purchasing of land and infrastructure development, such as road improvements, water line construction, street lights.

The 4B committee is responsible for

downtown renovation, city parks, and grants.

Both committees applied for the Texas Leverage Loan and each received \$350,000 to be used for development projects consistent with the City’s strategic plan.

Funding for the Texas Leverage Loan is provided by the city sales tax.

The sales tax is received from steady revenue when consumers purchase gas, food or any other goods in the city.

This sales tax is sent to the state, and a percentage of the funding is then returned to the city.

“Every month the city gets a check from the state which is a percentage of the sales tax that was paid in the City of Elsa by the people who buy at the different stores,” Garza said.

“December is one of the better months, as far as revenue. there’s more people in the community and there is more activity at the stores,” said Garza.

Sugar Blues (cont. from page 1)

three-year employee. "I am happy that we will be opening another facility in Elsa. It will be nice to have more help."

The city has offered to take over the lease of the old Colonias del Valle sewing plant building, located on Mile 17, as an incentive to invite Sugar Blues and promote the creation of more employment for the area.

The clothing industry has undergone a "major shift of industry," relying more on government contracts than contracts associated with the commercial industry," Grajales said. In order for Sugar Blues to acquire government contracts, more workers must be hired to ensure that contracts are met.

"I was going to just open another shop here in Pharr," said Grajales, "But when the city offered the use of 10,000 square-feet of space with machines, it just seemed easier to expand to Elsa."

Olga Moya, current employee and Elsa resident, seemed pleased about the plans for the expansion. "Elsa

"...when the city offered the use of 10,000 square-feet of space with machines, it just seemed easier to expand to Elsa."

- Elvira Grajales,
Sugar Blues Owner

needs more jobs. There is only the H.E.B. It will be very convenient for me since I live in Elsa."

Sugar Blues currently plans to move only government-contracted work to its new Elsa facility. Future government contracts include a five-year agreement with the Defense Department to sew 50,000 cots per year.

In addition Grajales said that a shipment of material, sent by the government, had just been received for the creation of rifle straps.

"It says on the box that the straps must be made in Elsa," Grajales said. "Yes... made in Elsa."

Industrial Park (cont. from page 1)

States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for the construction of a 25,000 square foot building, which will be used to house businesses that wish to relocate to Elsa.

The struggle to secure grants for the creation of an industrial park has taken a great deal of time and energy of the city council, the city manager, and members of the 4A advisory committee.

City officials see the grant as a victory in its path toward economic development. On the other hand, officials see the meaningful participation of residents in community and economic development projects as a larger victory.

The city plans to break ground within the next two months, and the park is scheduled to open in about one year, officials said.

**La próxima edición
de esta revista
será bilingüe.**

4B Committee Works to Beautify Elsa

Keeping Elsa beautiful has become a priority among city officials and the community.

And as part of this beautification effort, the city is offering local merchants the opportunity to renovate their businesses by applying for a City of Elsa grant.

The money available for these grants totals more than \$100,000, and comes from the Texas Leverage Fund, a state-sponsored loan program for economic development.

The program was organized by the city's 4B committee, which advises the City Council on economic development projects.

In order to be eligible for the grant, business owners are required to stay in business for three or five years in Elsa, officials said.

The project is being organized in several phases. The first phase will allow merchants from Highway 107 to Farm-to-Market Road 88, starting with the Chiropractic and Rehabilitation Center north to R&R's, to apply for the grant.



Delta Auto Supply is the first business to receive a Main Street grant for renovations.

Delta Auto Supply, located on the corner of 88 and Fourth Street was the first to apply for the grant, and is currently renovating the front-part of the business.

Businesses interested in applying for the grant should contact City Hall or Fabian Guerrero, city attorney and main street project coordinator.

Three Elsa Parks Will Undergo a “Facelift” For Spring

The City of Elsa is currently working on a beautification project to renovate all the city parks.

“All three parks will be given a facelift to get ready for the spring,” said city manager Leonardo Camarillo.

“The city council is committed to providing citizens with areas where they can take their children and spend quality time together.”

Each park, Mario Leal Park on Hidalgo Street and 9th Street, Modesto Hernandez Park on North Broadway, and Elsa City Park on 4th Street and Broadway Street, will undergo renovation by installing new playground equipment, picnic tables and other improvements, city officials said.

“Renovations are already underway. It’s taken a long time to do this, but finally we’ll be able to enjoy it,” Camarillo said.

Improvements to the parks will cost an estimate of \$30,000, and are being funded by the 4-B advisory committee, which is made up of seven community members, including two city councilmen.

A new playground unit, which will



Mario Leal Park, as well as two other parks in Elsa, will receive much-needed renovation within the next few weeks.

cost \$20,000, will be installed at Mario Leal Park, and will allow almost 30 children to play at one time.

“The order for the new unit has already been made, and it will have a specialized foundation so kids won’t get hurt,” Camarillo said.

The other \$10,000 will be used to

replace benches and tables at the parks, and to repair playground equipment.

Completion time for the renovations of the park is not yet known, but officials are planning to host a grand opening in the near future.



Building a New Community, by Delvis Cortez

Building Our Communities

This inaugural edition of the City of Elsa Newsletter is truly a collaborative enterprise between the City of Elsa leadership, students from Edcouch-Elsa High School, the Llano Grande Center at Edcouch-Elsa High School, and respective community members.

We congratulate the City for having the faith that our young people can indeed participate in professional journalism and community building. Indeed, the City models good behavior when it places responsibility on the shoulders of our youth.

As we together continue to struggle public conversation.

We must continue to challenge ourselves with the question of how all of us can participate in a real democracy? And it is important that our young people become a part of answering this. We are also acutely aware of the great wisdom and experience of our elderly. As 19-year old Elsa artist Delvis Cortez depicts in his adjoining art piece, the young and the elderly can clearly partner in building our community structures.

We hope this newsletter becomes a conduit through which our elderly, our youth, and everyone else can express their wisdom for greater community development.

Llano Grande Center Staff

The City of Elsa
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Elsa, TX 78543

