



Casa de Amigos
Helping People Help Themselves

Casa Caller

Helping People Help Themselves

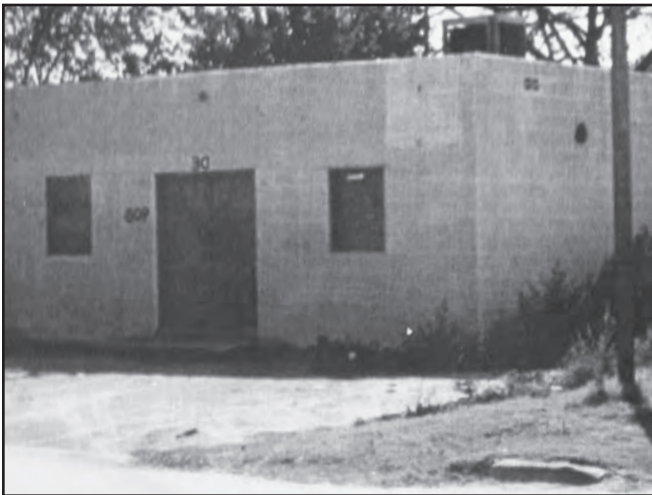
Quarterly Newsletter of Casa de Amigos

Phone: 432-682-9701 • Fax: 432-682-3817

SUMMER 2009

VOLUME 39, NO. 2

HELPING PEOPLE FOR 45 YEARS!!!



Casa de Amigos' first facility was located at 906 N. Dallas by St. Mark's Methodist Church members in July 1964. The abandoned grocery store rented for \$50 per month. The church's Saturday morning rummage sales covered the rent.

Casa de Amigos has been helping people help themselves for 45 years. **A potluck celebration recognized the service on Sunday, June 28, in St. Mark's United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall, 1701 N. Main, Midland.** The event acknowledged leadership from St. Mark's who started the agency, provided opportunity to see other agency supporters and friends, and offered the chance to view old scrapbooks, share stories and hear entertainment.

Leading the group of St. Mark's members who **founded Casa de Amigos in July 1964 were Pastor O. A. McBryer, Robbye Tolli-son, Kathryn Tyra and Janis Glass.** The congregation made a conscious decision to stay on the east side of Midland in order to offer outreach to Hispanic and African-American families rather than build a new church on the community's west side along either side of Andrews Highway.

The first facility for the agency was located at 906 N. Dallas. Rent for the former grocery store building was \$50 per month. Saturday morning garage sales held by church members helped pay the rent. Agency services began with programs for various ages. Cooking classes, preschool activities one day a week, English Classes (Each One Teach One), sewing classes sponsored and taught by First Christian Church, a teen girls club, teen boys club, family planning and potluck nights for the neighbors were scheduled.

SENIORS CELEBRATE MAY IN STYLE

May is celebrated nationwide each year as Senior Citizen Month and Senior Services at Casa de Amigos participate with fun activities. The agency's Senior Services are a vital part of programming which help low-income seniors stay active and independent.

The staff planned an Older Americans Month dinner and dance with mariachi music. **Carlos Luis Mendoza, Telemundo news anchor,** attended and spoke about seniors' wisdom and contributions to their families and community. **Isabel Gonzales, LBSW, Senior Services Program Director,** presented each senior with a certificate thanking them for caring about others. She also thanked the volunteers and food donors.

The seniors start the program each day with a cup of coffee and visiting among friends. Activities are scheduled, including bingo every Tuesday and Friday since most everyone enjoys competing for the bingo prizes. Table games help the seniors'



Natividad Ramirez, left, Dolores Gonzales and Gloria Granado have fun in the Senior Hat Parade in April. Women decorated their hats and then modeled them for their peers. Music accompanied the display of their fun designs.

memory by keeping them alert and thinking. Other activities include pool, exercise, dominos, Spanish Bible study, grief recovery and crafts.

Following a full morning schedule, lunch is served through the Nutrition Program of Community and Senior Services an av-

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LETTER FROM LAEL: *Extending Circles of Care*

As I reflect on 45 years of service for Casa de Amigos, I am reminded of the analogy of a pebble thrown into the water with circles extending outward ever farther from the point of the pebble's entry.

One congregation and a few hands initiated the services through Casa de Amigos and bit by bit, year by year, their zeal and support for "improving the quality of life throughout the community by helping others help themselves" has expanded.

In fact, after the first year of service, multiple congregations were included through the Midland Council of Churches (now the Midland Association of Churches) until 1973 when Casa de Amigos

became a United Way of Midland member agency. More and more businesses and individuals in the community became aware of agency services during that decade.

In the 1980s, corporate volunteerism by employees of ARCO and Texaco were utilized for children's tutoring. Then in the 1990s, the "circles" widened even further with AmeriCorps being contracted through the Mental Health Association in Texas, until the agency was funded for its own AmeriCorps project: "Familias Unidas" through the Texas Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service from 2000 to 2003.

Now approaching another decade of

service, it seems that the circles have continued expanding outward while other circles from new pebbles are just beginning. Thus the cycle continues!

It is exciting to be associated with an organization that remains vital and responsive. The ultimate challenge is to remain focused and meet the current needs of individuals and the community.

Like the circles from a pebble thrown into the water, reaching out and caring for others does make a difference.

Lael Cordes-Pitts, LMSW
Executive Director
(1985 to present)

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Shannon Lenisa, retiring board member at far left, new board member Chris Johnson, and Nancy Bowlin, fundraising chair and retiring board member, visit at the agency's Annual Board Meeting in May. Shannon and Nancy each has served two terms on the board and organized the Celebrity "Waiters Gone Wild" fundraising event. They now will serve on the Honorary Board of Directors.

BOARD RECOGNIZES RETIRING MEMBERS

Each year at the agency's annual meeting, outgoing Board members are recognized and new ones are introduced. This year brought a number of changes, with many completing their term of service and moving to the Honorary Director role. They include: **Nancy Bowlin, Larry Gilbert, Steve Hardesty, Vicki Jay, Shannon Lenisa and Word Wilson.** Hermann Eben was recognized for his service since 2002.



Hermann Eben

New members elected to serve include: **Roy Adams, David Bledsoe, Alisha Brown, Michelle Ellwood, Chris Johnson, Sally Kvasnicka, Jacob Ontiveros and Sandra Villarreal.**

THE CASA CALLER

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TALKING ISSUES

Rosalind Grover, fundraising chairman for Midland Memorial Hospital Foundation, educated the agency's senior citizens on the hospital's bond issue in April. Translating for her is Isabel Gonzales, center. MMH President Russell Meyers explained the facility's history and provided a visual presentation of the proposed space.



CLEANING SERVICE EASES COUPLE'S PAIN

Vergia Collins, Citywide Community Services Program Coordinator, recently visited an elderly couple to interview them about the agency's home cleaning service.

The husband is terminally ill and receives services from a hospice agency. The couple is raising two grandchildren under the age of four because the father is in prison and the mother does not want to care for the children.

Vergia explained to the couple that she had no time slots for cleaning currently available, but would call them when one became available. Their Hospice social worker was very concerned about the husband's cancer and the delay in cleaning. In a few days, a slot opened and Vergia was able to have a homemaker clean for the couple one hour per week. Since there are two elderly people in the home, they will receive two hours per week when another time slot becomes available. The help of having their home cleaned once a week has eased a little of the pain in their lives.

SENIORS ENJOY THEIR DAYS

Continued from Page 1

erage of 45 seniors per day. Many of the seniors then go home after lunch, but some stay until 2 p.m. to play dominos or pool.

Health is especially important for seniors too. Programs are presented by Agri Life personnel on nutrition education and by other volunteer health professionals on stroke awareness, diabetes care and the importance of exercise. Senior participant **Zora Parker** brings new music and exercises for the seniors to do. This helps **Maria Martinez, Senior Activities Program Coordinator**, keep the class lively and interesting. Many Home Health services also present programs to the seniors.

Isabel Gonzales helps translate the seniors' letters as part of the program's case coordination. She patiently helps them understand a situation from the correspondence they bring for her to read and explains more to them. Isabel also guides them in the steps that must be taken to settle any problems. Some of the seniors do not speak English so Isabel's ability to translate is a big help to them.

The Senior Services' staff offer their clients socialization, a nutritious meal each day, activities, health information, exercise and connection to the world around them.

A summer picnic is planned for **Thursday, July 2**, at Hidalgo Park. The seniors will enjoy sitting under the protective roof that covers the picnic tables while enjoying bingo outdoors. After bingo, the seniors' picnic lunch will be served, according to **Dolores Tucker, Senior Services Program Aide**.



Isabel Gonzales, Senior Services Program Director, received a cross for 30 years of outstanding service to the agency's senior citizens at the annual meeting held on May 18.

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COOPERATION KEY TO SERVICES

Silvia Lemos, Health/Dental Services Program Director, reports that Casa de Amigos and Midland Community Health Services (MCHS) work closely together on providing health services to clients in the best possible way. Silvia refers patients to MCHS to see a doctor and MCHS refers patients to the agency's Diabetes Nutrition Education Classes. Likewise, Silvia refers patients to MCHS for dental treatment and, in turn, the MCHS dental clinic refers dental patients, ages six to senior citizens, for free teeth cleaning and X-rays arranged by Casa de Amigos at the Howard College School of Dental Hygiene in Big Spring.

"It's good to be able to work together and meet the needs of the patients," says Silvia.

DIABETES: CARING FOR THE TOTAL BODY

Diabetes Education classes are a series of six classes provided for diabetics or caregivers, spouses and mothers of diabetics. The classes are offered two to four times a year.



Silvia Lemos, Health/Dental Services Program Director, coordinates the Monday evening classes by scheduling various health professionals to lead the sessions.

Lindy Tefteller, Agri Life Extension Service Agent, and Gloria Steelman, long time volunteer for the health

program, also attend every Monday evening.

Course topics include: Introduction to Diabetes, nutrition, healthy cooking and recipes, eye care, foot care and exercise. Dr. Gerardo Escobedo, an ophthalmologist specializing in diabetes' eye disease, also attended in May. Diabetes is not a curable disease and people must learn the importance of taking care of their total body.



Gloria Steelman, health services volunteer, shows girls at the Children's Dental Month Fair how much sugar is in different food items.

IF IT LOOKS GOOD, READ THE LABEL

"Read it before you eat it." This advice referring to labels on food was given to youngsters at the Children's Dental Fair held onsite during National Children's Dental Health month in February. Parents in attendance were given a hand-out called "The Dangers of Sugar," which listed tooth decay, gum disease and other medical conditions caused by eating too much sugar.

Thomas Youngblood, DDS, did oral exams with his dental hygienist assisting him. His dental assistant registered 86 attendees at the fair. A Hula Hoop was used to demonstrate two minutes of time and to show how long teeth should be brushed. Facilitators also showed children and parents the proper way to brush teeth so children can avoid painful dental problems.

A family size toothpaste and mouthwash bottle were given as door prizes for each of six drawings at the event. Before leaving the fair, every child received a toothbrush and toothpaste provided by several Midland dentists.

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VITA ASSISTANCE HELPS FAMILIES, ECONOMY

The agency's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program prepared 518 tax returns in 2009 and Midland families who came to the agency received \$746,278 in tax refunds. Part of a VITA Coalition, 54 percent of the total free tax returns completed by businesses and other agencies in Midland were filed at Casa de Amigos. The local Internal Revenue Service (IRS) assisted in providing the free tax preparation for low-income families in Midland.

Of the \$746,278 in refunds, \$302,178 was returned to families who qualified for Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). EITC refunds are payable to low-income families who make less than \$42,000 annually with the credit amount based on the actual amount of income for each family. Another \$131,075 was returned to families through the Child Care Tax Credit (CCTC) program for anyone who has a child(ren) and owes any amount of tax.

A community benefit is that many of the tax return recipients spend their refund in Midland. They may pay medical bills, purchase new home appliances, buy a car to go to work or spend the money for house taxes. Others put their tax refund in savings for a down payment on a home or to start a small business through an Independent Development Account (IDA) program with Midland College where funds are currently matched three to one. Both the Midland families and the local community benefit from the VITA program.

CLASS NOTES

SUMMER LITERACY PROGRAM

Staff members in the agency's education area hope children will not spend their summer days in front of the television or playing computer games. They are providing a **Summer Literacy Program which includes reading, cooking, gardening, outdoor activities, crafts, computer activities and character education.** The **Midland Police Force's** crime unit will also be a part of the program. Summer sessions for children, grades one through six, are scheduled from 12 noon to 5 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays until August 7. Over 60 children are participating.

GED CLASSES START

General Education Development (GED) and English Language Development (ELD) classes are scheduled for 9 to 11 a.m. Mondays through Thursdays until August 7 and alternating evenings 7 to 9 p.m. For more information, call **Paul Brooks, Education Program Director, or Tracie York, Education Program Assistant.**

FUN AT KIDS COLLEGE

Several elementary aged children attended **Kids' College at Midland College** this summer. Each child attended up to three classes. Some of the classes included: Communications, learning how to interview, write articles and lay out newspapers; Science/Math including Math Games and Manipulation; and Personal Development which teaches how to take care of skin, nails and hair.

The First Generation group from Lee Freshman High School are students who will be the first members of their family to prepare for college. They provided an Easter egg hunt for Homework Help students at Casa de Amigos. Lee Freshman students at right display the eggs they prepared for the hunt.



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BURMESE FINDING SUCCESS LOCALLY

In late March, 13 Burmese people who had just lost their jobs arrived at Casa de Amigos. By the first of May, 12 of the 13 people had jobs in the community and had learned enough English to communicate at work. The newcomers were willing to take any job to sustain their families.

During the spring, the agency aided a total of 20 Burmese people. Of this group, nine people took advantage of the

agency's English Language Development (ELD) classes and 16 individuals were served by the Social Services program.

First Presbyterian and Trinity Presbyterian Churches are sponsoring the Burmese people. They initially came to Midland because local families and friends told them there were jobs here. After living in Michigan, Georgia, Florida and Houston, their culture has taught the refugees to be hardworking, normally

going beyond the work given and wanting to please their employers. While learning English, the fluent individuals translated for the others.

Catarina Medrano, Social Services Program Director, introduced the Burmese to pizza. She says, "They had never had pizza or cheese before and they loved both. Another day they asked me to order pizza for my lunch. They wanted to treat me to pizza."

NEEDED: SUPPLIES FOR SCHOOL

"Casa de Amigos annually announces a 'Back-to-School Drive' over the summer months," says **Catarina Medrano, Social Services Program Director**. Supplies are being collected for grades kindergarten through 12th grade. Checks, cash and gift cards are also accepted.

Volunteer tasks include sorting supplies and clothing, assisting families to find the correct size of clothing and issuing supplies and clothing to children and their parents. For more information, call **Dinah Doggett, Volunteer Services Coordinator**.

The following items are needed for the Giveaway!

Black & blue pens, pencils, folders with pockets & brads, map colors, scissors, school boxes, glue, crayons, loose leaf paper, 1-inch 3-ring binders, markers, 2-inch 3-ring binders, rulers, erasers, highlighters, and tab dividers

Clothing needed: Gently used clothes and school uniforms, size 5 toddlers to XXL (high school students). Colored and White shirts plus khaki or dark pants.

'MONEY TALK' CLASSES TEACH SKILLS

"Money Talk" was a series of classes offered this spring as part of the on-going FYI (For Your Information) classes facilitated by Ida Fletcher, Life Skills and Self-Sufficiency Program Coordinator.

Volunteer Martha Lowe, Certified Financial Counselor and bookkeeper, led the discussions each Wednesday. Lowe's financial certificate is from the **Dave Ramsey Financial Peace University program**. Topics covered were bargain shopping, getting out of debt, insurance (what and why), retirement, college funding and planning for a mortgage. Martha has since become a teacher in the English Language Development (ELD) classes at Casa de Amigos.

ATTORNEY ANNOUNCED

Patrick McMonigle is the new managing attorney for the legal clinic coordinated locally by **Legal Aid of Northwest Texas**. He follows **Todd Stephens**, who has joined the Midland Attorney General's office. The managing attorney normally handles the difficult cases for people who come for help. Legal Aid schedules volunteer attorneys on-site on a regular basis to assist clients with legal matters.

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HONORING THOSE WHO MAKE DIFFERENCE

ANNUAL MEETING AWARDS

At the agency's annual meeting on May 18, two individuals and one group received the outstanding agency awards bestowed on volunteers each year.

Martha Lowe, who is a full-time volunteer, a Dave Ramsey Certified Financial Counselor and bookkeeper was the recipient of the Amiga del Ano award. Martha volunteered in English Language Development (ELD) classes and taught eight "Money Talk" sessions. She has since been hired as an ELD instructor.

Receiving the Amigos del Ano award was **Charles Taylor, Stakeholder Relationship Tax Consultant with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)**. Taylor served as the IRS liaison with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. He recently moved to Dallas with the IRS.

Receiving the Amigos de Ano award for group recognition were the **National Senior Corps programs including Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions and Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)**, all funded through Community and Senior Services. The Foster Grandparents work with Homework Help and other children's activities in Youth Education. The Senior Companions serve and provide friendship to the agency's elderly clients. The RSVP volunteers support the agency with administrative tasks.

VOLUNTEER WEEK

During National Volunteer Week April 27-May 1, **Dinah Doggett, Volunteer Services Coordinator**, honored volunteers in each of the agency's program areas. Each year more than 600 volunteers participate in Senior Services, Health/Dental Services, Education, Social Services, agency operations and administration.

In 2008, a total of 12,971 volunteer hours were contributed. This represents an amount of \$262,662.75 donated to the agency based on the Independent Sector's value of \$20.25 per hour, an increase from \$19.51 per hour in 2007.

Dinah says, "We are able to serve our clients due to the dedication and hard work of our volunteers. The agency is blessed with a group of willing people who truly care and want to help others."



Shawna Coleman, Agency Director, and Vincent Aullegus, newly named Eagle Scout, discuss the improvements Vincent achieved for the agency. He planted shrubs, defined flower beds, painted and provided a bench at the facility's east entrance. Vincent also put plants in the marquee's flower bed and contributed two sets of alphabetical letters for the marquee.

DIVERSITY: LEARNING AND GROWING

A Cultural Diversity Training was held on May 1 at First Presbyterian Church. **Lael Cordes-Pitts, LMSW, Executive Director**, says, "We want to raise awareness of cultural diversity and offer the opportunity for training and discussion among people of different races, religions and economic levels."

Together with **Midland Association of Churches and Church Women United, Casa de Amigos** hosted the cultural program for the fourth consecutive year.

Nearly 100 persons attended the luncheon with the **Rev. Jon Stasney and Pastor Roy Smith** presenting the keynote address on "Learning and Growing from Cross Cultural Experiences." **Janet Kearby of Chevron** described cultural clothing modeled by agency staff members from various southeast Asian countries.

Some of the topics for the cultural diversity seminar included:

"Being Culturally Sensitive," **Elsa Ward, Cultural Diversity Coordinator, Midland Memorial Hospital**; "Preserving Cultural Heritage," **Lisa Yater, LCSW, Samaritan Counseling Center**; "Culture in the Work Place," **Angela Joiner, Citibank Wadley Branch Manager**; "Understanding Poverty," **Emma Galindo, Early Childhood Education, MISD**; and "Recipes for Life," **Dolores Vick, Coordinator of Community Affairs, Chevron**. **Linda Hamlin with Midland Fairhavens and Susan Edwards with Baptist CRISIS** addressed the homeless issue.

Lael commented, "Midland is continually gaining people from different cultures. Cultural Diversity Training helps individuals understand the cultures, religions and work ethics of newcomers to the area."

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2009 Celebrity ‘Waiters Gone Wild’ Dinner

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The *Wild* World of Sports
Thursday, August 13, 6:30 p.m.
Petroleum Club of Midland

For more information, call
Lael Cordes-Pitts or Dinah Doggett, 682-9701

For this year’s theme, costumes can depict any sports person, such as Michael Phelps, Harry Caray, Joe Namath, Colt McCoy, Jim Courier, Bob Stoops, a Red Raider or MHS/LHS athlete or cheerleader.

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