



Casa de Amigos
Helping People Help Themselves

Casa Caller

Quarterly Newsletter of Casa de Amigos

www.casadeamigosmidland.org
Phone: 432-682-9701 • Fax: 432-682-3817

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"I've always had this dream of helping people, and Casa de Amigos has made my dream come true."

– Margaret Hernandez

Margaret Hernandez poses with her family at her September 13 retirement party. Shown, from left, are grandson Edward Salgado, daughter Mary Olgin, husband Fermin Hernandez, son Sammy Hernandez, Margaret, daughter Paula Torres, son John Hernandez, and granddaughter Monica Abila. Son Eddie Hernandez is seated.



SON LED MOM TO CASA, CAREER

Completing 35 years of service as an employee with Casa de Amigos, **Margaret Hernandez** was honored at a retirement party in the Senior Services area on Monday, September 13, and again at the Board of Directors meeting the following Monday. Margaret's family stood by proudly as she received a plaque with artwork of the agency's logo donated by Midland Iron Works.

Margaret credits her youngest son, John, for leading her to the tiny building on Dallas Street in 1970. "He told me he was going to his grandma's house, but he stayed too late so I had to go find him," she says with the patience only a mother knows. John was attending Casa de Ninos, one of four services offered by Casa de Amigos at the time. She was happy to find such a place and her passion for helping others soon found an outlet.

First serving as a volunteer for five years, Margaret was hired on August 22, 1975, as the full-time Assistant Director under Executive Director Marcia Ingram. The two women were the only paid staff at the time. In the early days, Margaret would pick up ladies in a small car and deliver them for crafts at the agency's center, a tiny two-bedroom, one-bath house on Dallas Street.

When a bus was donated, she transported children to participate in the after-school program.

As the organization and community grew, Margaret's role developed further and she was named Director of Operations in the early 1980's. In that capacity, Margaret oversaw usage of the facility, building rentals, bus tickets and transportation. She found great meaning in life as she provided transportation for clients needing to go to the doctor, pick up medicine, or pay bills. Many times, she would even translate important information for clients during their appointments.

Throughout 35 years, Margaret's knowledge of community needs and people has been a great asset to Casa de Amigos and she has played a crucial role in building the agency's credibility in the community. "She knew nearly every Spanish-speaking family in town and they knew her," says Marcia Ingram. Also called the Neighborhood Liaison, staff members could turn to Margaret for "good gossip," or client successes and stories of how people found help through Casa de Amigos. When asked how she was able to serve for so long, Margaret replied, "You see, I've always had this dream of helping people, and Casa de Amigos has made my dream come true."

LETTER FROM LAEL: *Passion Motivates Employees*

In the last issue of the Casa Caller, I indulged in some personal reminiscing by covering 25 years of service during my time as Executive Director (1985 to present). Now Margaret Hernandez, our longest employed staff member, has retired after 35 years of service and expressed that working here at Casa de Amigos helped her fulfill a dream. I offer the comments below (gathered from other staff members by Fran Billingsley, former Director of Public Relations and Marketing, 2007-10,) to show the dedication and commitment they have for working with clients served by the agency:

"MY INDIVIDUAL PASSION is working to serve older persons when they seek to have their needs met and their dreams fulfilled. Something I find refreshing is when the needed assistance is supplied and the older person becomes energized so they can live out their potential." – **Isabel Gonzales, LBSW**, Senior Services Program Director (1979 to present)

"AFTER SIX YEARS as a member of the Board of Directors, I thought I knew a lot about Casa de Amigos. After a few weeks as Acting Executive Director (during

Lael's maternity leave in Spring/Summer 1987), I realized what a truly dedicated and hard-working group of staff and volunteers Casa is blessed with...Being in the office daily, sharing in the staff's triumphs and woes, and seeing the dozens of volunteers appear faithfully to carry out their part in the many programs and services of Casa has given me new appreciation of what a wonderfully well-organized place Casa is." – **Nancy Jordan**, Administrative Assistant (1998 to present)

"I AM PASSIONATE about the Youth Education program. Too many of our kids get left behind because of something simple that they missed learning in their early school years. It is good to know that explaining a math formula or providing support and encouragement with reading can help them get over a mental block that makes it difficult to process words. I believe that all kids can 'conquer' the world if they want." – **Tracie York Greene**, Education Program Assistant (2008 to present)

"MY PASSION is the Health/Dental Services program that supports the mission of Casa de Amigos. Providing preventative

health education screenings, encouraging attendance for the services and assisting clients with caring for their health are all important so each can live a long healthy life." – **Silvia Lemos**, Health/Dental Services Program Director (2003 to present).

FRAN'S PASSION was the General Education Development (GED) study program. "Often there is a reason why the students did not graduate from high school and they have to work doubly hard to pass the exam. It is so important that they pass it. A GED certificate opens doors for further education possibilities and increases their potential for added income."

It has been said that the national average for employment with non-profit organizations is three years. Some note that the time requirements and lower salary levels for non-profit workers are not the motivating factors. I believe that employee passion is found when people approach their job with meaning and purpose. For staff members at Casa de Amigos, that is exemplified in our mission statement of *"improving the quality of life throughout the community by helping people help themselves."*

On September 23, **Lynn Rogers** was welcomed as Director of Public Relations.

"Working for Casa de Amigos will be challenging and rewarding for me," she says. Lynn is enthusiastic about being employed with such an active agency whose aim is to *"improve the quality of life by helping people help themselves."*

A Midland native, Rogers received her associate's degree from Midland College and her bachelor's degree in Communication from UTPB with the support and encouragement of her husband, Cole, who is a credit analyst at Commercial State Bank.



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THE CASA CALLER

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DIEZ Y SIEZ BRINGS MEMORIES

The agency's Senior Services Center was filled with decorations, patriotic songs and speeches along with people dancing the marcha zacatecas on Thursday, September 16, in celebration of Mexico's independence from Spain.

Maria Martinez, Senior Activities Program Assistant, read "Poema a la Bandera," a poem about the Mexican flag and freedom from Spanish rule. The event was sentimental for many seniors because it took them back to their childhood days in Mexico.

Eduardo Aleman, from left, Connie Catano and Ray Madrid entertain the seniors with popular dance songs from their generation.



LEARNING TO BALANCE LIFE

An education program called the **Matter of Balance** project ended in August with a celebration by Humana Market Point providing refreshments and certificates to 11 persons who attended five or more of the eight sessions.

The program was designed to teach people skills that help them keep steady, strong, and avoid injuries. Participants expressed satisfaction with the information they received about fall prevention and are now less fearful of falling and plan to remain active. They all said they wanted to let other people know about the importance of the program. The participants encouraged each other to do all that they could to remain independent seniors.

Program Coordinators Isabel Gonzales, LBSW, and Vergia Collins, who completed certified coaches training for this course, will schedule another class soon.



GRANT SUPPORTS SENIOR SERVICES

The Carl B. & Florence E. King Foundation awarded a \$25,000 grant in June to support Senior Services provided by the agency to meet the needs of low-income and minority senior citizens. Services include:

- Citywide Community Services, a home cleaning and yard mowing service for low-income elderly and handicapped persons
- Individual casework
- Planned activities
- Hot nutritious meals onsite each Monday through Friday prepared by Community and Senior Services.

Due to this generous grant, more than 1,000 seniors can continue to participate in the services, educational courses and events offered at Casa de Amigos.

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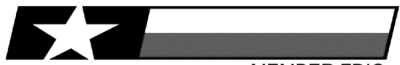
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WHAT'S YOUR NUMBER?

....your cholesterol number, that is.

Last month, 30 people discovered their own cholesterol count at the screening service provided annually by Health/Dental Services.

Some patients come to compare their count to last year's numbers; others are first time patients. During the screening, clients receive handouts with information on what their cholesterol number means and how they can improve their cholesterol count. **Health/Dental Program Services Director Silvia Lemos** reports that patients called ahead this year to arrange an appointment. This reduced wait time for frustrated clients and cancellations.

Successful screenings like this are part of the agency's continuing efforts to improve health and wellness for low-income persons in the community.

The table below shows what the various numbers mean:

LDL Cholesterol Levels	What It Means
Less than 100	Optimal
100-129	Near optimal
130-159	Borderline high
160-189	High
190 and above	Very high



TECH STUDENTS TO ASSIST

Two students enrolled in the Texas Tech School of Medicine will soon be volunteering onsite under the supervision of **Dr. Mohsin Syed**.

Altogether, 16 students have been assigned to the Permian Basin area for the final two years of their four years of medical school with Texas Tech.

"We're all really excited about helping out the community," says student-doctor **Victor Lohla**.

The students are grateful for the opportunity to gain field experience in a community centered clinic. They will be doing the initial patient assessments with Dr. Syed confirming the diagnosis and writing prescriptions. Victor says all 16 students are interested in being involved at Casa de Amigos.

A HEALTHY ROUNDUP

SIGN UP FOR COOKING WORKSHOPS

This fall, Health Services is offering cooking workshops targeted for managing diabetes. **Lindy Tefteller** leads the sessions on behalf of Texas AgriLIFE. Participants gain hands-on experience as they help prepare the foods and then taste their creations. These courses are especially beneficial to people who have developed diabetes and are unaware of how different foods can impact their blood sugar. The workshops are as much fun as they are informative.

DENTAL FAIR COMING IN FEBRUARY

During August, Health/Dental Services offered free toothbrushes to families that applied for school supplies. In addition, 129 parents received oral health information handouts with basic education about the importance of dental hygiene. The 431 children enjoyed selecting a toothbrush in their favorite color. Families were invited to visit Casa de Amigos again on Saturday, February 26, 2011, for the 3rd annual Children's Dental Fair.

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THE RUSSIAN CONNECTION

The following is an account of a client success story from Education Program Director, Paul Brooks:

"We have a woman in the English Language Development (ELD) class whose first language is Russian. At first, she was very hesitant about coming to class; however, after I assured her husband that we would be able to accommodate her, she began attending classes.

"The woman soon started bringing a friend with her because her language skills had improved so much that she knew her friend could be helped as well. Both women are excited about the learning and social opportunities that ELD classes have given them. We're glad they are attending and improving their English," says Paul.

ELD Classes are offered Monday through Thursday from 9 to 11 a.m. and Tuesday and Thursday from 7 to 9 p.m.

ARTISTIC ENDEAVORS

Roland Rose began working this fall as arts instructor for the After School Fine Arts Program, made possible by a sub-grant from Arts Assembly of Midland through the Texas Commission on the Arts.

Classes are scheduled onsite Mondays and Tuesdays from 4:15 to 6:30 p.m. During the rest of the week, he teaches art to children at Midland's



Roland Rose, left, instructs Victor Rico, Nathaniel Mendoza and Elfrain Rico as they practice drawing cartoon characters.

Montessori School and adults at St. Nicholas' Episcopal Church.

Rose was an art teacher in the Andrews school district for 36 years and has developed an art program called "Promise Camp," now in its sixth year, for children of incarcerated parents. He has successfully redirected the children's art subjects away from guns and violence toward

flowers, and cartoons. Rose also enjoys improving the children's self-image by drawing their portraits for them.

AMERICORPS NEWS



SHARING A LAUGH

David Valdez, part-time AmeriCorps STARS member, tutors first grader Michael in reading. Ten full-time members are placed at DeZavala and Crockett Elementary schools and 20 part-time members work with children at Ben Milam, South and Travis Elementary Schools plus after school and evenings at the agency.

JOINING THE TEAM

Miriam Boroski received a warm welcome in early October as AmeriCorps Project Supervisor for the Student Tutoring Assessment Readiness Success (STARS) program. Having taught high school and elementary school for the past six years, Miriam and her family recently relocated to Midland from Pittsburgh, PA. Her husband, Karl, is the new District Director of the Buffalo Trail Council for the Boy Scouts of America in Midland. The couple is glad to be back in the friendly state of Texas. More than that, Miriam is ready to "serve the community by joining the team at Casa de Amigos."



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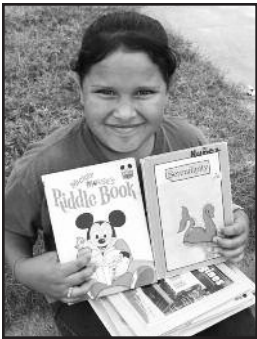


Harlin the Magician, left photo, entertains a crowd of youngsters. Lee Burns, above left, and Deborah Young show off their prizes.

FAMILY FIRST CROWD LOVES EVENT

More than 280 people learned about the fun of reading at the 3rd annual Family First event, coordinated by the **Junior League of Midland**, on October 2.

Focusing on the importance of reading for all family members, adults attended informational classes that included: decoding legal vocabulary and documents, techniques for and benefits of parents reading with children, and how to incorporate puppets into reading.



Jennifer Harris from the Midland Public Library taught storytelling techniques, including how to convey emotion by changing voice tone and volume. **Patti Groce**, Executive Director of Midland Need to Read, emphasized that children who are taught at home will be ahead of their class when they are in school. Children roared in laughter during **Harlin the Magician's** magic reading performance. Others "ooh-ed" and "ah-ed" over **Liz the Iguana**. Special guests **Mary and Neil Early** made the children giggle and sing along during story time and taught parents how to make puppets during the classroom sessions. The **Midland Fire Department** was onsite for youngsters to explore the fire truck.

The **Junior League** gave away games, learning toys, and gift cards to a crowd filled with painted faces and balloon animals. Finally, each member of the audience selected several free books to take home as they "shopped" from over 600 titles donated from **Barnes & Noble**, **Friends of the Library** and others.

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DRIVING MRS. C TO INDEPENDENCE

The following is a client success story written by Life Skills for Self Sufficiency Program Coordinator Ida Fletcher:

"Mrs. C. enrolled in the Life Skills program in April because she wanted to learn to drive to be more self-sufficient. Mr. C. has been driving for a while, but works nights and was not available to teach his wife. Mrs. C. and her family are refugees from Burma.

Mrs. C. and I practiced her driving in church parking lots and empty neighborhoods until school ended and off and on during the summer. During my last home visit, Mrs. C. proudly told me that she passed her driver's test and is now driving to pick up her child and other Burmese children after school. She said that she is very proud of herself and thanked me for helping her master the skill of driving."

FIGURING SUCCESS

The following story was shared by Catarina Medrano, Social Services Program Director, after the annual School Clothing and Supply Giveaway helped 465 children in August:

Ms. L requested assistance with purchasing a scientific calculator for her son, a senior taking calculus at a local high school. She went to buy one, but realized she could not afford the price. Her car insurance payment was due and she didn't want her son to fall behind in math if she waited for her next paycheck. Ms. L said her son is doing well in school and takes honors classes. She is taking budgeting classes and learning to buy only what she can pay for.

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RUFINA AND STUDENTS: Giving Each Other Inspiration and a Life

Rufina Gomez gets up very early on weekdays to catch the bus that brings her to Casa de Amigos where she teaches 10 to 15 adult English Language Development (ELD) students. The students, whom she calls "her children," are very eager to gain a solid understanding of the English language. Her encouragement seems to spring forth like a fountain from within her. She always reminds her students to stay positive. Ms. Gomez tells them, "When your boat gets turned upside down, you have to choose whether to sink or swim."

Ms. Gomez, whose own boat was turned upside down, speaks from experience.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

While working as a subrogation specialist at Mabry & Mabry in Dallas, she was sitting at her desk when the veins in her retina ruptured and she suddenly lost her vision. Devastated and depressed, "I felt like I wanted to die," she says with tears in her eyes. The unexpected incident was a result of diabetes complications and is known as low vision impairment. This means she cannot read what is written on paper. Ms. Gomez's niece connected her to the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services for the blind, located in Odessa. Immediately her caseworker, Joe Garcia, suggested that she volunteer at Casa de Amigos in Midland. Soon she began to find new meaning for her life: growing and developing her ELD students.

Lauren Villanueva, a student who began classes August 24 and plans to earn a college degree after ELD course completion, says that Ms. Gomez is an excellent teacher, explaining every-

thing with great patience and teaching with all her heart. She is very passionate and interactive, using words like brilliant, awesome, and excellent to help encourage students as she gives them a

chance to better their lives. Ms. Gomez considers herself a simple woman who shapes and molds the lives of her students so that they may move forward and achieve dreams.

Like all agency volunteers, Ms. Gomez is an incredible asset. She taught five students during the summer. Four of the five students are now in ELD Level 2 classes and one student went back to Mexico to complete his master's degree in engineering. Paul Brooks, Education Program Director, said the agency would not have been able to offer Summer ELD courses without her.

Ms. Gomez can be found having fun with her students, Mondays through Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. While classes usually end at 11 a.m., her students are so eager to learn that they stay an hour longer. Ms. Gomez even hosts six students in her home for one-on-one tutoring on Fridays and Saturdays.

"My students give me an inspiration and a life," she says, beaming proudly. And she gives the same in return.



BOARD MEMBERS EARN HONORS

Two Casa de Amigos board members received recognition this fall for their service. Board of Directors Vice President and Annual Campaign Chairman **Alan Krenek** was awarded the "Outstanding Volunteer Fundraiser" Award from the Permian Basin Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. **Alisha Brown Hudman**, Public Relations Chair, received the Beacon Award from the Non-Profit Management Center for "Excellence in Communications."

Alisha Brown Hudman, right, accepts her Beacon Award.

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