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My First Months in Office

Welcome and thank you for taking the time to read my newsletter. My name is David Stout and I'm the El Paso County Commissioner for Precinct 2. I represent one of the most diverse precincts in the County, which includes all of downtown El Paso, Segundo Barrio, parts of the Northeast, the Lower Valley, and the Westside. Precinct 2 truly is representative of our entire community, and I'm honored and proud to represent you on Commissioners Court.

Each quarter I will publish a newsletter with updates on County business and to keep you informed about the projects on which I have been working. Since taking office on January 1, 2015, I've been busy getting to know the various county departments, their leaders, and the employees who, day in and day out, work hard for the public. County government involves many people collaborating on a wide-range of issues; from law enforcement and the courts, to public health care and quality of life. I've also spent time in the community, attending neighborhood association meetings, visiting senior citizen and nutrition centers, and holding community meetings of my own.

Our Next Community Meeting

Join us on Wednesday May 6 at

Sorrento Italian Restaurant located at **5325 Dyer Street, El Paso, TX 79904.**

Get an update on county government and ask me any questions or concerns you may have!

See you from 6:00 - 7:00 PM.

There are a host of important issues that remain ongoing, and my staff and I have hit the ground running to learn those issues as best we can, and to find solutions and respond to pressing county matters that affect your daily life.

I want to make myself available to all members of the public and want you to know that my door is always open if there is anything with which I can assist. My office is your office. My staff is your staff. We are at your service. You can visit us at 500 E. San Antonio Avenue, Suite 301 and you can always reach us by calling (915) 546-2111 or by emailing us at commissioner2@epcounty.com.

These are challenging, but exciting times in El Paso County and I look forward to working with my colleagues and the public to make our community stronger, safer, and healthier. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve Precinct 2!

Sincerely,

David Stout

Upcoming Events

Sin Cama Fun Walk & Movie**May 1, 2015**

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, MHSS will have an event at Houston Park located at 810 Montana from 6 - 10:30 PM

MDA Lock-Up at Carino's**May 13, 2015**

Come bail me out of jail in support of Muscular Dystrophy Association at 1:00 PM at Carino's Italian Restaurant located at 675 Sunland Park.

Ascarate Historical Marker**May 23, 2015**

We will be unveiling a new historical marker at Ascarate Park. Bring the whole family to the event! It will happen from 10 AM to 11 AM



Robust Boards & Organizations Make for good governance

I have been appointed to diverse boards since beginning my term in office. I sit on the board of directors of the Rio Grande Council of Governments, which is an association of regional local governments. I also have the privilege of serving as an Honorary Director on the Medical Center of the Americas Foundation.

This board meets quarterly and the next meeting will be in August.

I have been appointed to serve on the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone #5, which oversees downtown redevelopment and allows for flexible building codes, direct grants, and rezoning changes to help our downtown district flourish.

Investments in Ascarate Park Make for Positive Outlook

Let me first address the elephant in the room: There were some bad actors who allowed bad and possibly illegal practices to take place at Ascarate Park. At the beginning of the year, it was revealed that fees paid to enter the park were unaccounted for. After an administrative and criminal investigation, the park's manager and an accounting clerk were fired and arrested on theft and forgery charges, respectively. The park's special events coordinator also resigned. Public Works staff and Commissioners took swift action to implement new security measures to ensure that nefarious activities by park employees do not take place again.

On March 2, Commissioners authorized \$197,723 for new secure cash drawers and safes, new locks, a barrier gate and vehicle counter, security cameras, alarms, and the hardware and software needed for the new security equipment. In addition, a policies and procedures manual was adopted so park employees know exactly what their duties are and are not, eliminating ad hoc decisions from being made in the future. I want to stress that a few bad apples should not reflect on all of the park staff. Our staff are dedicated and hardworking County employees who truly cherish the park. Morale is on the rise among those employees and public use of the park is doing well. The county is vetting applicants for the manager and events coordinator positions.

Moving forward, the park will continue to be accessed for free Monday-Thursday. An entrance fee of \$2 will be charged for each vehicle on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. An entrance fee of \$5 per vehicle will be charged on holidays and during special events, or those that attract more than 200 participants.

During last summer and into last fall, the park's lakes experienced a drop in water levels, making it difficult for residents to fish and use the lake. The low levels were a result of a water pump failing and wells drying up. I'm happy to say that Commissioners made investments in early February to address that issue. We authorized an expenditure of \$197,000 to dig a new well to service the large lake, and \$18,000 to repair a pump that will service the golf course.

Ascarate Park is truly a county asset that we should all be proud to call our own. It is the largest public-use park in the county and spans more than 400 acres. Centrally located at 6900 Delta Drive, the park is easily accessible to residents from across the county, and offers a variety of fun recreational activities for families. The park includes both an 18-hole and 9-hole golf course with beautiful, manicured greens; a 48 acre lake for fishing and canoeing; an aquatic center; baseball, softball, and soccer fields; basketball and handball courts; a 1.4 mile jogging or walking trail that circles the large lake; and picnic areas.

With the recent investments the county has made towards the park, including renovating the swimming pool, new paint jobs in picnic areas, planting new trees and grass, and mending the surrounding fences, I believe Ascarate Park has a very positive outlook and I encourage all to take the time to stop by and enjoy what it has to offer.

Recognizing our community's culture, efforts, and service

One of the greatest aspects of being on Commissioners Court is recognizing and honoring members of the community and community organizations for their achievements and efforts to raise awareness of important local, state, and national issues. As such, I have been honored to sponsor resolutions that do just that.



César Chávez Social Justice Month

On March 2, 2015, Commissioners Court adopted a resolution declaring March 2015 as "César Chávez Social-Justice Month" so all El Pasoans, especially children, will carry Chavez's message into the future. Representatives from Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe accepted the resolution and commenced a month full of activities. La Fe held diverse events that included "Mujer Art Exhibit" in celebration of César Chávez month with local female artists at La Fe Culture and Technology Center, as well as a celebration of César Chávez Day on March 28.



Opposing Anti-Immigrant Legislation

The Border Network for Human Rights accepted a resolution adopted by Commissioners Court on March 12, 2015. The resolution registered El Paso County's strong opposition to legislation before the 84th Texas Legislature that would unfairly target and harm our immigrant and border communities. We oppose legislation that would establish border checkpoints, erode the trust that exists between local peace officers and the community, allow peace officers to engage in racial profiling, divert local resources to enforce federal immigration law, and further militarize the border. Commissioners Court urged the Legislature to dedicate its efforts to policy areas with real, demonstrated areas of need like infrastructure funding, public and higher education funding, and protecting the human and civil rights of all.



Global Youth Service Days

The weekend of April 17-19 was declared "Global Youth Service Days" by the El Paso County Commissioners Court. This movement began in 1988 and mobilizes millions of young men and women around the world. This is the tenth year that the County's Juvenile Probation Department partnered with the Housing Authority of the City of El Paso on a community service project. This year, with a theme of "Combating Hunger," our youth made a community garden, with fruits and vegetables, for the Paisano Green Community during the days of service.

County continues work on deal with UMC, Children's

Public access to healthcare is one of my policy priorities as a commissioner, and for this reason, I've spent much of my time working on a solution for the financial issues facing El Paso Children's Hospital (Children's) and its relationship with the University Medical Center (UMC). I have been in constant communication with UMC officials and have also held discussions with their counterparts at Children's with the hopes of facilitating an agreement between the two hospitals and the Commissioners Court that would allow Children's to continue providing services at the current level, that would not further hinder UMC's financial well being, and that would not overburden taxpayers while providing a certain level of accountability to them as well. I believe that both UMC and Children's are tremendous assets to our community that provide immeasurable and high quality health care services to our residents.

If you aren't familiar with what has been going on, this is what you need to know: In 2007, county voters approved a \$120 million bond to create a nonprofit pediatric hospital for the community. The result was El Paso Children's Hospital, which is housed in a building funded by those taxpayer dollars, but owned by UMC. Children's pays rent to UMC for that space as well as for different services UMC provides. According to the original feasibility study done before Children's was built, the hospital should have become self sustaining within 5-7 years. However, due to a number of issues, Children's began to have financial troubles. Of the most devastating were changes in state funding formulas for hospitals, which precluded Children's from receiving tens of millions of dollars it had been counting on, as well as Texas' Governor Rick Perry's decision not to expand Medicaid in our state. In the first quarter of 2014, Children's advised UMC that it could no longer pay what was owed to them, and a year later, the debt had grown to close to \$90 million.

The task at hand now is to find the solution I made reference to earlier. UMC and Children's, along with Commissioners Court, are currently in the process of negotiating a framework in which Children's can survive under UMC's leadership. A set of terms have been agreed upon by which Children's will maintain its separate license and nonprofit status, its board will be appointed by UMC, and that board will chose the CEO. As part of this framework, I believe it is important to hold Children's accountable to the taxpayer, since they would become part of the public County Hospital District, so my goal is to ensure that the public has oversight, especially when it comes to merging or consolidating the two hospitals, the dissolution of Children's, or the reduction of major clinical services.

Even though we are all working hard and are closer to agreeing on how to move forward, I don't want the public to be under the impression that Children's is saved. This is far from true. Right now, UMC and their auditors are conducting a due diligence study which will reveal the financial health of Children's and indicate to us whether this plan will even be feasible. If the plan can be implemented, it will most likely be years before Children's is profitable and self sustaining.



I had the pleasure of reading a Dr. Seuss book to elementary students from our area in celebration of National Read Across America and in observance of Dr. Seuss' Birthday.

Advancing El Paso County Objectives in Austin

Part of representing El Paso County requires bringing our collective message to state lawmakers in Austin. By and large, across the public and private sector, we have common policy goals and objectives to meet, including fostering a good climate for increasing economic development, improving the quality of life in our community, and ensuring greater access to healthcare for our residents. To meet those goals, I've traveled to the state capitol twice as Commissioner on behalf of the County.



From February 9 to 11, County representatives, along with representatives of the City of El Paso and other entities traveled to Austin for "El Paso County Days." More than 100 El Pasoans attended this event where we met with state leaders about the issues that are most important to our county. As a delegation, we conveyed to state leaders the positive momentum in El Paso to include the revitalization of downtown, efforts to make increase our commercial tax base, as well as our efforts to enhance the quality of life and attract new people and businesses, which includes our new baseball stadium and Triple-A baseball team.

I had the opportunity to meet with the President of the Texas Association of Business, Chris Wallace, as well as the Executive Director of The Equity Center, Wayne Pierce. I also met with George P. Bush, Texas Land Commissioner. It was a very successful event and El Paso really left a mark.



On February 20, I had the honor of crowning Maria Guadalupe Gonzalez as 2015 Queen of the Carolina Happiness Center



The County Service Awards were held on January 27, recognizing county employees for many years of service. Congratulations!

Testimony on Revenue Caps

On April 9, I traveled to Austin on behalf of the County to testify against Senate Bill 182. This bill would significantly limit local government control over assessing and collecting ad valorem taxes that provide vital services to our residents, including police and fire department protection. If adopted, the property tax rollback rate would be reduced greatly, limiting our ability to shape policy based on our community's needs.

As it is with many other counties statewide, when it comes to the local property tax payers' bill, El Paso County makes up only 16 percent of what is paid. And, similar to most other Counties, 71 percent of our budget goes to services mandated by the State of Texas. I believe that local government knows its community better than state government and we should be making the decisions on raising and spending our tax dollars as we see fit. SB 182 was left pending in committee and no vote has been taken, yet.

New leaders illustrate County's resolve to improve government

Steve Norwood, Chief Administrator

El Paso County has recently undergone a major administrative change. Commissioners late last year

created the position of Chief Administrator, a professional management position to oversee the day-to-day operations of county government. The change will make the County more efficient, freeing Commissioners and the County Judge to focus on larger policy issues. After the recent departures of the Tax Assessor-Collector and Elections Administrator, I'm happy to announce that those positions have been filled by competent, experienced individuals as well.

Steve Norwood was selected as the Chief Administrator and recently joined El Paso County, beginning a new era in our county government. Mr. Norwood brings 17 years of experience to El Paso County. Previously, he served as city manager for Prescott, Arizona and Round Rock, Texas. He is working to make the county run as efficient as possible. He will be in charge of overseeing eight county departments that include Budget and Fiscal Policy, Public Works, the Domestic Relations Office, Public Defenders, Human Resources, Mental Health Support Services, the Medical Examiners Office, and Community Services.

Thank you to Rita Ruelas and her staff for the tour of Mental Health Support Services!



Lisa Wise, Elections Administrator

Another important vacancy that was recently filled was the County Elections Administrator position. The five-member elections commission selected Lisa Wise, who hails from Douglas County in Nebraska where she served as Chief Deputy Election Commissioner. This position is critical to the county, as Ms. Wise will be responsible for the elections department's operation, and making sure elections adhere to state law. The commission set out to find a person who would focus on non-partisan voter registration efforts and increase overall voter turnout in the County.



Thanks to the Thomas Manor Neighborhood Association for allowing me to give them an update on county business at their March meeting.

Ruben P. Gonzalez, Tax Assessor Collector

Commissioners Court recently appointed Ruben Gonzalez as Tax Assessor-Collector, temporarily replacing longtime public servant Victor Flores who resigned his position in February for personal reasons. Mr. Gonzalez will finish Flores' term that ends in December 2016. Mr. Gonzalez brings experience to the position, as he was once the regional manager for the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, where he spent more than 38 years. He also was responsible for training tax assessor-collectors in rural and urban West Texas counties, including El Paso County. The Tax Assessor-Collector's office helps the public with automotive license and registration renewals, vehicle titles, alcoholic beverage permits, hotel-motel occupancy taxes, and collects road and bridge fees.



On March 24, I met with Ciudad Juarez Mayor Enrique Serrano to discuss strengthening bilateral ties between our two communities. We discussed projects on which El Paso County and Ciudad Juarez can collaborate.

Stout in the News

January 2015

- New year brings new leaders for county government, KVIA, 1-01-15
- El Paso County employee arrested in connection with alleged forgery case, El Paso Times, 1-09-15
- Descubren desfalco en Parque Ascarate; cesan a empleada e indagan a dos mas, El Diario, 1-10-15
- El Paso County Commissioners Court to discuss contract for county chief administrator, El Paso Times, 1-10-15
- Proyectan taller educativo de leyes municipales para universitarios fronterizos, El Diario, 1-25-15

March 2015

- Ascarate Park upgrades proposed to prevent theft, KDBC, 3-01-15
- Aprueban Plan de reestructuracion en parquet Ascarate, Univision, 3-02-15
- El Paso County Commissioners approve spending \$200K in security equipment for Ascarate Park, El Paso Times, 3-02-15
- Cash security upgrades approved for El Paso County, KDBC, 3-02-15
- New policies, spending to prevent fraud at Ascarate, KVIA, 3-02-15
- El Paso County Commissioners appoint new tax assessor-collector, El Paso Times, 3-09-15
- Se salva Children's Hospital: logra pacto con UMC, El Diario, 3-10-15
- UMC y Hospital Infantil establecen acuerdo financiero, Univision, 3-10-15
- UMC, El Paso Children's Hospital reach agreement, KTSM, 3-10-15
- UMC, El Paso Children's Hospital reach deal; Commissioners Court needs to approve it next, KVIA, 3-10-15
- UMC y Hospital Infantil en mediacion, Telemundo, 3-10-15
- Aprueba Condado resolucion contra propuestas anti-immigrantes, Telemundo, 3-12-15

February 2015

- Discuten creacion de oficina Pre Juicio, Telemundo 48, 2-02-15
- Sheriff PIO to get pay increase and hire an assistant, El Paso Times, 2-03-15
- Detienen y fincan cargos de robo contra exgerente del parquet Ascarate, Univision 26, 2-05-15
- Por cobro de renta en campo, realizan ultima edicion de torneo de golf, El Diario, 2-23-15
- Crean linea telefonica de quejas, Telemundo, 2-23-15
- Aprueban linea telefonica para realizar denuncias de malos manejos en el Condado de El Paso, Univision, 2-23-15
- El Paso County Commissioners Court no longer allows free use of Ascarate Golf Course, El Paso Times, 2-23-15
- Dice Hospital Infantil 'no' al UMC: exige renegociar, El Diario, 2-25-15
- Posible banca rota del Hospital Infantil, Telemundo, 2-25-15
- Response tough, critical to Children's Hospital possibly filing bankruptcy to avoid UMC takeover, El Paso Times, 2-25-15

March 2015 Continued

- Condado de EP se pronuncia en contra de propuestas anti-immigrantes, Univision, 3-12-15
- Aprueban implementar medidas de seguridad en oficinas del condado, Telemundo, 3-16-15
- UMC board members meet with commissioners about debt resolution, KVIA, 3-16-15
- Se reune UMC y condado, Buscan entablar el rumbo que se tomara con el Hospital Infantil, Telemundo, 3-17-15
- Rechazan activistas medidas migratorias expuestas por Texas, El Diario, 3-25-15
- El Paso group protests against border security bills in Texas Legislature, KTSM, 3-25-15
- Fiador pide a Texas investigar si Oficina del Auditor recauda dinero de forma legal, El Diario, 3-25-15