

Regional Pursuits

JULY 2009 • VOLUME LX



COMMISSIONER JOHN INGRAM ELECTED LRGVDC PRESIDENT

At a recent Membership meeting of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC), Commissioner John Ingram was unanimously elected President of the Board. "I am extremely honored to have been elected as the new LRGVDC President, and I look forward to continuing the positive momentum and progress created by Past Presidents of this organization. The regional approach is an effective way to address the comprehensive needs of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and the LRGVDC will continue to be a leader in this regard," stated Commissioner Ingram.

The remaining LRGVDC Board officers elected are: 1st Vice President, Harlingen Mayor Chris Boswell; 2nd Vice President, Hidalgo Mayor Pro-tem Alvin Samano; Secretary, Hidalgo County Commissioner Sylvia Handy; Treasurer, and, Edcouch Mayor Pro-tem Eddy Gonzalez; and Mr. Arturo Ramirez Immediate Past President. Other members elected to the LRGVDC Board of Directors include: Commissioner Sophia Benavidez, Cameron County; Judge Pro-tem Aurelio Guerra, Willacy County; Commissioner Roel Landa, City of Alamo; Commissioner Edward C. Camarillo, City of Brownsville; Mayor David S. Simmons, City of Donna; Council Member Gus Garcia, City of



Commissioner John Ingram

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The LRGVDC Board meetings are normally held the 4th Thursday of each month. For more information on meeting times and location please visit our website at www.lrgvdc.org.

Commissioner John Ingram
Elected LRGVDC President

Preparing for Hurricane Season

LRGVDC Holds Disaster
Recovery Workshop

Regional Police Academy and
Training Center

Justice Assistance Grant
Stimulus Funding- 1.7 million

Local Ombudsman Hold
3rd Annual Long Term Care
Training

LRGVDC Assists Local Health
Authorities in mitigating the
H1N1 (Swine Flu) Outbreak

"Fatal Vision" Alcohol
Awareness Program by
Regional Police Academy

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PREPARING FOR Hurricane Season

Hurricane Season is here... have a plan ready? June 1st marked the official start of the 2009 Hurricane Season. The first line of defense in protecting yourself, your family and your property comes from being informed and prepared for a tropical storm or hurricane in the Lower Rio Grande Valley Area. Here are FEMA's top 10 tips for becoming "Hurricane Ready."

- Know what problems you might face if a storm is approaching. Are you in a storm surge area or an area that is flood-prone? Do you live in a mobile home? Is your area vulnerable to tropical storm force winds?
- Create an emergency plan for you, your family or friends. Make sure everyone is familiar with the plan and practice it at least once before a storm forms in the Gulf. The American Red Cross and **Ready.gov** have excellent information on developing your plans.
- Build an emergency kit. Include one for your home and one for your car in case you have to evacuate. Make sure to include cash, important papers such as mortgage and insurance information along with food items, water, medications, etc.

- Have an individual or family communications plan. Pick someone in another region as an emergency contact so people will know where you and your family are located. This plan will also help if you and your immediate family get separated during a storm event.

- Plan for family members or others with special needs or disabilities. Consider the medications or items specific to their needs in the emergency kit. If you don't have a car or need special transportation, make arrangements with friends, neighbors or relatives for a ride. You can also contact your local emergency manager to find out what arrangements may be available or call 211 to register as a special needs or economic hardship requiring evacuation assistance. It's critical to have a plan ahead of time!

- Know where to go if you are instructed to evacuate. Do you have family or friends with whom you can stay? If making hotel reservations, make sure to confirm them.

- Stay alert to weather information and listen to your local emergency managers. Keep your gas tank full at all times. When they say it's time to evacuate, DO IT!

- Be prepared to be on your own for

several days whether you evacuate or not. That may include being without electricity or clean drinking water. Take this into consideration when building your emergency kit.

- Prepare your home and property for severe weather. Suggestions include flood-proofing your home, securing your mobile home, and if outside of a flood area, building a safe room to protect from wind and tornadoes. Also, consider purchasing flood insurance now. There is a 30 to 90-day waiting period before the policy goes into effect. Go to **Floodsmart.gov** for details.

- Include your pets in your planning. It is critical to board them or take them with you. In either case, advance planning remains the key to your animal's health and safety and your peace of mind. The Humane Society provides excellent tips on preparing your pets for emergencies.

For more information on disaster preparedness, visit **www.ready.gov**, **www.fema.gov**, Texas Governor's Division of Emergency Management, or local Emergency Management Offices.

LRGVDC Holds Disaster Recovery Workshop

The Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) appropriated 1.3 billion dollars to Texas for eligible activities for both Hurricane Ike and Dolly. The Office of Rural Community Affairs (ORCA) is the lead agency to administer these funds and has requested the assistance of Regional Councils of Government to develop a Method of Distribution for these funds. The LRGVDC Region was allocated 55 million dollars which was distributed as follows among the three counties:

Cameron County	45%	\$24,750,000
Hidalgo County	45%	\$24,750,000
Willacy County	10%	\$5,500,000

LRGVDC along with local governments have been working diligently since January to develop a Method of Distribution for the Region. The Method of Distribution was finalized and approved by ORCA on May 04, 2009, and is available on the LRGVDC web site (Disaster Recovery Funds page) along with the application deadline.



An application workshop was held on May 06, 2009 at Weslaco City Hall by the LRGVDC in cooperation with ORCA and South Texas Development Council; there were over 100 participants attending the workshop.

Regional Police Academy and Training Center Ventures Out to Include More In-Service and Specialized Training

The Regional Police Academy and Training Center is venturing out to include more in-service and specialized training and professional development for the law enforcement community.

We are currently offering the legislatively mandated courses (Cultural Diversity, Special Investigative Topics, and Critical Intervention Training) as well as professional development opportunities (PPCT Defensive Instructors Course, SFTS Instructors Certification, School Resource Officer Certification). Our plans include courses geared toward university and college police officers (Campus Protection Officer Course), human trafficking, and gang intelligence. Telecommunications operators are included in our planning as we offer the Full and Less than Full Access NCIC/TCIC

courses, the Basic Telecommunications Course, and Crisis Communications.

On the Corrections front, we have partnered with LCS Corrections Services, Inc. to provide the Basic Jail Operations Course to Corrections Officers in the private prison system. We will also assist LCS in delivering professional development courses such as Cultural Diversity, Suicide Prevention and Detection, and Inmate Rights and Privileges.

The staff of the LRGVDC Regional Police Academy has worked diligently to make these seminars a reality and continue efforts to improve the professional development of today's law enforcement, corrections officers, and support personnel in the delivery of public safety throughout the Rio Grande Valley.



Outgoing Board Member Soyla Gonzalez was recognized with a plaque presented by Board President Mr. Arturo Ramirez at the May LRGVDC Board of Directors meeting



Office of the Governor, Criminal Justice

Division Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council Criminal Justice Program

Justice Assistance Grant Stimulus Funding - \$1.7 million

The Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, Criminal Justice Program staff has worked diligently with every eligible law enforcement agency in the tri-county area. Thirty-five agencies will be able to benefit from this funding. The JAG stimulus funds will compliment the existing Criminal Justice Strategies already in place by continuing a balanced approach to justice which include enforcement, prevention and restoration. These funds present a unique opportunity to strengthen the foundation of the criminal justice system in the Lower Rio Grande Valley by equipping law enforcement agencies with the resources required to enhance public safety.

- ★ Fiscal responsibility, accountability, and transparency.
- ★ Equip criminal justice professionals with the appropriate resources to enhance public safety.
- ★ Target funding where it will have the greatest impact without an expectation of long-term support.

Promote programs incorporating or addressing:

- ★ Border Security
- ★ Governor's Gang Initiative
- ★ Capacity Building in Rural Texas Regions
- ★ Regional and Local Priorities



REGIONAL POLICE ACADEMY PRESENTS “Fatal Vision” Alcohol Awareness Program

On May 27, 2009, Director Paul R. Williams of the Regional Police Academy and Training Center, along with Cadet Selina Conde (Cadet Class #133 – Harlingen), were invited to Freddy Gonzalez Elementary School in Edinburg to talk to the students about alcohol awareness. About 175 students and teachers filled the cafeteria and were entertained by Williams and Conde. The students volunteered some teachers to wear the fatal vision goggles and Conde and Williams selected students to wear the goggles as well.

The fatal vision goggles are designed to simulate alcohol impairment of the visual senses. When worn, participants have difficulty performing tasks using gross motor skills such as walking and standing. For this demonstration, Williams and Conde had teachers walk a straight line without the goggles and repeat the activity with the goggles.

The student participants wore the goggles while trying to catch or throw a soft ball. None of the students were able to catch the ball nor were any able to throw the ball to the receiver. The students were also asked to walk a few feet toward each other and shake hands; they were unable to complete this task.

After wearing the goggles and participating in the activities, the students were able to see how alcohol affects the body. Information about the law was shared with the students and they were reminded to ask the adults in their lives about drinking and driving to ensure those adults would not be drinking and driving.

The students, faculty and staff thanked Williams and Conde and invited the Academy personnel back to future events at the school.

Freddy Gonzalez Elementary school is located at 2401 South Sugar Road in Edinburg. Mr. Arnoldo F. Benavides is the principal.



Director Williams assists a teacher from Gonzalez Elementary to walk a straight line while wearing the Fatal Vision Goggles that simulate alcohol impairment.



Director Williams instructs two students from Gonzalez Elementary to walk to a teacher across the room while wearing the Night Fatal Vision Goggles; neither student was able to accomplish the task due to the simulation of alcohol impairment.

LRGVDC Assists Local Health Authorities in Mitigating the H1N1 (Swine Flu) Outbreak

Contrary to popular belief, the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS) program's main objective is not only to aid local governments and other entities during biological threats, natural weather events or terrorist threats, but the MMRS staff is also very much involved in preparing jurisdictions for any type of potential mass casualty event including the outbreak of epidemic diseases.

This past quarter, the Lower Rio Grande Development Council's (LRGVDC) MMRS had its first medical occurrence with the H1N1 (Swine Flu) outbreak. In keeping with MMRS's primary focus to develop or enhance existing emergency preparedness systems to effectively respond to a public health crisis, the LRGVDC's MMRS program was in step with local health authorities and first responders in mitigating the H1N1 health crises.

Within the first 48 hours of the potential epidemic outbreak of H1N1 flu, Dr. Brian Smith, with the Department of State Health Services and an MMRS Board Member, authorized the release of Tamaflu, an antiviral medication used for flu treatment. This was significant because it was the first time the pharmaceutical caches have ever been used. The cache project was created in 2006 to stock hospitals with specific medications that aid our first responders exposed to hazardous materials or epidemic outbreaks.

During the H1N1 situation, the MMRS program proved to be an important link in the communication between hospital staff and local and state health departments. This communication was integral to coordinate local response efforts throughout the Rio Grande Valley. Through the MMRS program, the hospitals from Starr County all the way to Cameron County had a point of contact for information and other resources that had not been available previously.

Even though the H1N1 health crises never fully blossomed into a full scale epidemic, it did provide the opportunity for the MMRS program and local health officials to reevaluate their health crises protocols. Should the H1N1 virus come back to strike the Lower Rio Grande Valley in the Fall, the MMRS program is inline with our local health agencies ready to mobilize assets and coordinate communication between everyone involved to minimize the confusion and maximize productivity.



Local Ombudsman Hold 3rd Annual Long Term Care Training



Frotze Kromeier speaking to attendees at the 3rd Annual LTC Training

The LRGVDC Area Agency on Aging's Ombudsman Program recently held their 3rd Annual Long Term Care Training for Social Workers. It was held May 20 – May 21 at South Texas College campus in Weslaco. The two days of training consisted of presentations on Medicare and Medicaid Fraud, Wills, Guardianship Program, State Surveys, and services by the Valley Association for Independent Living (VAIL). The second day's topics were "Conflict Resolution" and "Stress Management". These sessions were presented by Frotze Kormeier. Approximately 35 individuals attended the workshop. Continuing education credits were issued to social workers.

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