

SPRING BREAK 2010



TEXAS WEEK CONTINUES

Spring Breakers filled 90 percent of the Island's available hotel and condominium units this past weekend, business officials said, providing a much needed boost to the recently struggling local businesses.

► PAGE A3

SPORTS



UPDATES

Keep track of the 2010 NCAA men's basketball tournament schedule during March Madness.

► PAGE B3



BECKHAM'S EMPTY CUP

Unless David Beckham can mend it as well as he can bend it, soccer's now-limping glamour boy will miss this summer's World Cup — a blow to tournament organizers, sponsors, TV viewers and average fans.

► PAGE B4

CCC

HEALTH CARE SHOWDOWN

House Democrats triggered the countdown Monday for the climactic vote on President Barack Obama's fiercely contested reform of the health care system, even though the legislation remained incomplete and lacked the votes needed to pass.

► PAGE A8

OBITUARIES

Jonas Contreras Vazquez
 Guadalupe Sustaita Lopez
 Maria Rosa Gonzalez

► PAGE A4

MOST VIEWED ON THE WEB

STANDOFF

A federal agent said he was ready to die during a standoff a decade ago with a drug kingpin who once led one of Mexico's most violent cartels.

BrownsvilleHerald.com

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Good Morning!
 Thank you for reading today's edition of The Brownsville Herald



BORDER VIOLENCE

ON GUARD

RESIDENTS' REACTIONS



"Matamoros and Reynosa, that's fine. Juarez, now that's a jungle. I feel perfectly fine going to Matamoros and having a good time. I can just grab a cab and go wherever I need."
Andrew Hershsmul



"The situation is really bad over there, I just don't cross anymore. It's like in the movies — there really is no law over there. I just hope it doesn't get like that over here."
Alveda Balderas



"I'm scared. The situation has me scared because I hear there was a shootout here and a shootout there. I'm from Mexico so I occasionally get the urge to go visit my country. I still cross, but I don't take my car."
Dora Reyes



► **IMPACT:** LOWER BRIDGE TRAFFIC HAS \$3 MILLION ECONOMIC EFFECT ON CAMERON COUNTY, A2

Spillover feared

Valley residents concerned over cartel struggle



HERNANDEZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

People are seen crossing the Gateway International Bridge Monday into Mexico. The ongoing struggle between drug cartels has slowed the flow of people traveling to border cities in Mexico.

BY ILDEFONSO ORTIZ
 THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

The ongoing struggle in the northern part of Mexico between drug cartels has created an atmosphere of fear in the general public, many of whom have relatives just across the border. The main concern surrounding those fears is that the violence could spill over to the U.S. side.

"The situation is really bad over there," said Brownsville resident Alveda Balderas, as she walked along the border fence near Hope Park.

"I just don't cross anymore. It's like in the movies — there really is no law over there. I just hope it doesn't get like that over here."

In recent weeks, the state of Tamaulipas has seen several large-scale gun battles as the Gulf Cartel and the Zetas fight for control of the area. Mexican officials have confirmed reports of various shootouts in the cities of Reynosa, Matamoros, Rio Bravo, Tampico and other municipalities as the two organizations fight for control.

Despite the constant fighting, U.S. officials are not reporting any violence spillover. "Drug trafficking organizations in Mexico are engaged in an armed violent



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Soldiers stand guard at a crime scene Sunday where the crashed car of a U.S. consulate employee sits in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

TENSE AFTERMATH: GANGS BLAMED IN JUAREZ KILLINGS; MISTAKEN ID, PAGE A7

SPEAKING OUT: DEA AGENT RECALLS '99 STANDOFF IN MATAMOROS, PAGE A7

CARTEL THREAT: AFTER KIDNAPPING, SPILLOVER QUESTIONED, PAGE A5

struggle to control shrinking drug routes and territories," said Department of Homeland Security Deputy Press Secretary Matt Chandler.

PLEASE SEE VIOLENCE, A5

12 men arrested in 'john' operation

BY ILDEFONSO ORTIZ
 THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

Brownsville police arrested 12 men accused of soliciting sex in exchange for money from an undercover police officer, authorities said.

The arrests took place on Saturday night when a team of 10 police officers set up an undercover sting in the downtown area targeting "johns," or those who solicit prostitution, said police spokesman Sgt. Jimmy Manrique.

For the operation, a female officer disguised herself as a prostitute and stood at the 600 block of 13th Street waiting for prospective customers to approach and offer money in exchange for sexual favors, police records show.

PLEASE SEE ARRESTS, A5

2010 Census count begins

BY LAURA TILLMAN
 THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

In an area termed "hard to count," census officials say they are working hard to get Rio Grande Valley residents to mail their census forms back before May.

The census questionnaire has been pared down, millions have been spent on a Super Bowl ad, and "partnership specialists" have been working for more than a year to ensure forms are completed.

"Anybody in the Spanish-speaking community is considered hard to count," said Efrén Salinas, a media specialist for the U.S. Census Bureau in Dallas. To address the language barrier, areas with a large concentration of Spanish speakers will be sent bilingual forms.

PLEASE SEE CENSUS, A5

ONLINE POLL

Have you stopped visiting family and friends across the border due to the ongoing border conflict? To respond, go to www.BrownsvilleHerald.com.

AbbyB6	CalendarB9	CommunityB9	SportsB1	High 63°
AmusementsB6	ClassifiedC3	EditorialA6	TV ListingsB7	Low 47°
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GLAUCOMA 0.5% 15 ML TIMOLOL \$6.99	PAIN, INFLAMMATION 100 MG/120 CAPS DICLOFENAC \$8.99	HYPERTENSION 3 MONTH SUPPLY 5 MG NORVASC \$14.99 (GENERIC)	MIGRAINE 5 TABS/100 MG IMITREX \$17.99 (GENERIC)

RIO GRANDE VALLEY

VIOLENCE

FROM PAGE A1

"They are targeting and killing rival cartel members, innocent Mexican civilians, police and senior government officials among others. We are not, however, seeing any indication of similar violence here in the U.S."

On Sunday night, two men were shot and apparently kidnapped in the parking lot of the Walmart on Jackson Street in McAllen. According to McAllen police chief Victor Rodriguez, the shooting and apparent kidnapping appears to be related to organized crime, and the suspects and the victims probably knew each other beforehand.

According to the Congressional Research Service, the definition of violence spillover excludes trafficker-on-trafficker violence.

"Spillover violence entails deliberate, planned attacks by the cartels on U.S. assets including civilian, military or law enforcement officials, innocent U.S. citizens or physical institution such as government buildings,

consulates or businesses. This definition doesn't include trafficker-on-trafficker violence."

Brownsville Police spokesman St. Jimmy Manrique said their department continually monitors the situation in Mexico and is ready to respond to any situation.

"Our police chief (Carlos Garcia) is in regular contact with Mexican authorities, and whenever there is an incident of escalated violence that has the potential to spill over, we are prepared to deal with it properly."

U.S. Customs and Border Protection deferred comment to Chandler, who said DHS has been consistently strengthening security at the border with additional power and infrastructure.

"U.S. CBP, in coordination with federal, state and local law enforcement, remain vigilant in the wake of increased violence in Mexico and are determined to prevent violence crossing over to the United States," he said. Cameron county Sheriff Omar Lucio said his deputies constantly monitor the border situation and have contingency plans in place to respond accordingly.

While many are con-



THERESA N. MORALES/THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

The Gateway International Bridge leading into Mexico is seen from Hope Park in Brownsville on Monday.

cerned about the drug violence, Missouri native, Andrew Hershmuگل feels quite safe having a good time in Matamoros. Hershmuگل arrived this week in Brownsville as part of a yearly cross-country trip and was looking forward to visiting Matamoros.

"Matamoros or Reynosa, that's fine," he said. "Juarez, now that's a Jungle. I feel perfectly fine going to Matamoros and having a good time. I can just grab a cab and go wherever I need."

For Brownsville resident Dora Reyes, the ongoing violence saddens her

because it keeps her children from visiting Mexico. "I'm scared," Reyes said. "The situation has me scared because I constantly hear there was a shooting here and a shooting there. I'm from Mexico so I occasionally get the urge to visit my country."

Because of the violence,

Reyes has resorted to parking her car in downtown Brownsville and simply walking to Matamoros for some errands, limiting her visit to the main streets.

"My children, they don't cross," she said. "I only go a few blocks and come back."

CENSUS

FROM PAGE A1

"In previous years you could request a form in Spanish, but this is the very first time in census history that bilingual forms are being mailed out."

When forms are not sent back, it costs the U.S. government about \$60 to send a census worker on a home visit. More than a billion dollars would be saved if all census forms were returned by mail.

The census is also using partnership specialists like Felicia Ramirez to promote the census. These specialists reach out to community groups and government entities and get them to promote the census within the community.

Ramirez, one of three

partnership specialists in the Valley, says these relationships make a big difference. When trusted public entities promote the census, she said, they can make "challenging" groups like migrants and the elderly feel comfortable with the census.

"I met a woman recently who told me she was sending the census form in," Ramirez said. "To test out how well our methods have been working, I asked her why. She told me she saw Don Francisco talk about it on *Sabado Gigante* and she got an advertisement for it on her water bill. So there are two trusted sources, and she sent her form in."

The 10-question form is one of the shortest in the history of the census. It asks for your name, address, phone number, age, race and ethnicity,

gender, living arrangements and home ownership.

Information is kept strictly confidential by federal law, and the Census Bureau does not share data with other agencies, including law enforcement. Census workers assure undocumented immigrants that their legal status will not be in question.

"My parents are legal citizens," Salinas said, "and those without citizenship will fill out the form in the exact same way. There's literally nothing to fear."

Salinas said those who are undocumented actually have an incentive to return the form by mail: That way, they won't be visited in person by a government employee.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

willman@brownsvilleherald.com

After kidnapping, officials eye cartel threat

BY JARED TAYLOR
THE MONITOR

McALLEN — Suspected drug cartel hitmen held two men against their will before shooting them Sunday night in south McAllen.

Both men escaped with their lives. The men knew their suspected captors upon encountering them at a parking lot outside Walmart, 1200 E. Jackson Ave., police said. One man suspected of the kidnappings and shootings remained in police custody Monday afternoon.

"We suspect cartel activity by some or all of the persons we're looking at right now," McAllen Police Chief Victor Rodriguez said Monday morning. "We don't know the motive at

this point in time."

Despite that, law enforcement officials said the cartel-related incident does not demonstrate an example of "spillover" violence — often described by the national media as cartel-related violence on U.S. soil, but described by local authorities as an active incident of violence literally spilling north of the Rio Grande from Mexico.

Rather, it appears the kidnapping-turned-shooting was another in a long line of violent incidents involving victims and criminals with ties to drug trafficking — not the general public, authorities said.

"The jury is still out as to who is involved here and what happened," said John

Johnson, who heads the FBI's office in McAllen. "In general ... the vast majority of kidnappings we get involved with are drug-related. That's the way this threat has evolved here."

Investigators believe the two men voluntarily left with the suspected kidnappers in a Chevrolet Tahoe about 10:30 p.m. Sunday. When one of the men became concerned he was being held against his will, he bailed out of the SUV and was shot, the chief said. He then fled to a nearby Med-Care EMS ambulance facility, which reported the incident to police.

The other victim was left near a canal close to the intersection of McColl and El Rancho Roads, police said.

ARRESTS

FROM PAGE A1

The twelve men arrested were charged with one count of solicitation of prostitution and bonded out after posting an average bond of \$2,000, records show.

In a four-hour span, 10 different automobiles carrying 12 different men approached the female officer, records show.

According to police records, the men offered various amounts of money in exchange for sexual favors. The lowest amount offered was \$20 for oral sex and the highest offered was \$100 for sexual intercourse.

The men arrested were Jose Luis Rivera, 21; Gerardo Rangel, 20; Jacob Valentine Velasquez, 21; Fausto Ochoa, 40; Juan

CHARGED

- ▶ Jose Luis Rivera, 21
- ▶ Gerardo Rangel, 20
- ▶ Jacob Valentine Velasquez, 21
- ▶ Fausto Ochoa, 40
- ▶ Juan Pablo Magdaleno, 35
- ▶ Oscar Cantu, 33
- ▶ Jose Antonio Hernandez, 44
- ▶ Pedro Recio, 29
- ▶ Pedro Sanchez, 34
- ▶ Jesus Hernandez Cerbin, 44
- ▶ Jose Escobedo Martinez, 57
- ▶ Sergio Villarreal, 57
- ▶ Jesus Eduardo Serna, 30

Pablo Magdaleno, 35; Oscar Cantu, 33; Jose Antonio Hernandez, 44; Pedro Recio, 29; Pedro Sanchez, 34; Jesus Hernandez Cerbin, 44; Jose Escobedo Martinez, 57; Sergio Villarreal, 57 and Jesus Eduardo Serna, 30.

Police records show that Rivera is a Cameron County Detention Officer and Cerbin is an employee with the Brownsville Independent School District.

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