

Fall 2026

Vol. 2 No. 6

Houston Latino FAMILY MAGAZINE

The Voice of the Latino Family

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of Church on the Rock*
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WITH FAMILIES IN FAITH

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FALL EDITION

Dear HLFM Community,

Welcome to the fall issue of Houston Latino Family Magazine! With Thanksgiving approaching and Christmas around the corner, we enter a season filled with faith, family, gratitude, and cherished traditions.

At HLFM, we believe an informed community is a stronger community. With an important election ahead, our Houston Latino Family Magazine Latino Values Voter Guides for Harris and Fort Bend counties are now being distributed. These separate guides can be accessed by scanning the QR codes in this issue. Choose your county to explore our recommendations and endorsements.

For several months, we interviewed countless candidates from both sides of the political aisle, asking questions and listening carefully to their priorities.

We examined how their values and positions align with the concerns of Latino families, including safe neighborhoods, responsible government, faith, family, and opportunities for our children. We believe this work has produced a thoroughly researched guide our readers can use with confidence.

This issue also highlights several candidates and features Pastor Jorge Cardenas of Church on the Rock in Katy. This wonderful Colombian pastor has spent decades walking alongside families in faith, serving a congregation with diverse Latino backgrounds. His story reminds us how faith and fellowship strengthen our community.

Thank you to everyone who made our voter guides and this fall issue possible, and to our readers for trusting HLFM. We hope these resources help you feel more connected, better informed, and ready to make your voice heard.

May God bless you and your family throughout this fall and the coming holiday season.

With gratitude,



LARITZA GARCÍA



A WIFE AND MOTHER,

Jaramillo says that as judge she would focus on efficiently managing the court and its docket while ensuring that attorneys, court employees and the people appearing before the court are treated with dignity and respect



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**OUR HARRYS COUNTY
VOTER GUIDE**



**OUR FORT BEND
LATINO VALUES
VOTERS GUIDE**



Jessica Jaramillo

Experience, Service AND A COMMITMENT TO *Fort Bend County*

Jessica Jaramillo has spent much of her life in Fort Bend County, building a career centered on law, public service, and community involvement. Now, she is seeking to bring that experience to the bench as a candidate for Judge of Fort Bend County Court at Law No. 3.

Born in Yuma, Arizona, Jaramillo moved with her family to Fort Bend County in 1998. She graduated from Clements High School before attending Stephen F. Austin State University, where she graduated magna cum laude in 2007 after studying criminal justice and biology.

Jaramillo earned her law degree from South Texas College of Law Houston in 2011 and was licensed to practice law in Texas later that year. She established her own law practice and has developed experience across a wide range of legal matters, including criminal, juvenile, family, probate, civil and appellate law.

Much of her career has involved representing children, families, indigent clients and others facing difficult circumstances. Her work has included cases involving child abuse and neglect, human trafficking, family violence, juvenile delinquency and custody disputes. She has also provided legal assistance to military veterans through the Randall O. Sorrells Legal Clinics at South Texas College of Law Houston.

Her experience extends beyond the courtroom. Jaramillo was elected to Rosenberg City Council in 2024 and has served on city boards and committees. She has also taught as an adjunct professor at the University of Houston Law Center and has volunteered through her church and Saint Theresa Catholic School in Sugar Land.

A wife and mother, Jaramillo says that as judge she would focus on efficiently managing the court and its docket while ensuring that attorneys, court employees and the people appearing before the court are treated with dignity and respect.

For Jaramillo, the campaign for County Court at Law No. 3 represents another chapter in a career that has combined legal practice, community involvement and public service in the Fort Bend County community she has called home for nearly three decades.



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Julie Pickren:

BRINGING A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE TO TEXAS EDUCATION

For Julie Pickren, education policy begins with a straightforward principle: parents should play the primary role in decisions affecting their children's education.

A Houston native, small-business owner and mother of two, Pickren has spent more than a decade involved in education leadership. Today, she represents District 7 on the Texas State Board of Education, a sprawling district that includes Fort Bend, Brazoria, Galveston, Chambers and several other Texas counties.

Before joining the State Board, Pickren served as an Alvin ISD trustee from 2015 to 2021. During that period, the fast-growing district opened nine new schools while addressing the educational needs of a rapidly expanding student population. She has also served on the boards of Christian private schools and worked in education policy.

Pickren was elected to the State Board of Education in 2022 and began her term in January 2023. She currently serves as vice chair of the board's Committee on School Initiatives and has served on its Ad Hoc Committee on Social Studies.

As a board member, Pickren has emphasized parental involvement, educational options, academic achievement and ensuring that classroom instruction reflects what she describes as Texas and American values. She has advocated for families using public, private, charter and homeschool educational opportunities.

Outside public service, Pickren and her husband, David, are small-business owners and have supported charitable organizations, churches and other community initiatives.

Pickren is seeking reelection in 2026 as the Republican candidate for State Board of Education District 7, where she faces Democratic candidate Tiffany Perkinz in the November general election.



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Tamara McFarlane:

AN IMMIGRANT'S JOURNEY TO BUSINESS
AND PUBLIC SERVICE

Tamara McFarlane's journey to Fort Bend County began thousands of miles away in what was then communist Yugoslavia, where she grew up dreaming of someday living in the United States.

Today, McFarlane is a businesswoman, wife and mother of three who has called the Katy area home with her husband, Brad, for more than a decade. She is now the Republican candidate for Fort Bend County Clerk in the November 2026 election.

McFarlane brings extensive business and financial experience to the race. She spent approximately 25 years working in land acquisitions and divestitures for major corporations and also worked as a government auditor, where her campaign says her work resulted in millions of dollars in taxpayer savings. She later became a small-business owner in the real estate industry.

Her community involvement has included helping families affected by Hurricane Harvey and mentoring disadvantaged young people.

McFarlane has also been active in the election process itself. She previously served as a Fort Bend County election judge and became involved with the Republican Women's Club of Katy, where she serves as Vice President of Legislation.

As a candidate for County Clerk, McFarlane has emphasized efficient government, election administration, customer service and protecting county records, including efforts to combat property-title fraud.

From growing up under communism to building a career and raising a family in Texas, McFarlane says her experiences have shaped her appreciation for American freedom and public service. She is seeking to bring that perspective, along with decades of business and auditing experience, to the Fort Bend County Clerk's Office.



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Sandy Ibáñez: A FIFTH-GENERATION TEJANA SEEKING TO REPRESENT FORT BEND COUNTY

For Sandy Ibáñez, Fort Bend County isn't simply a place on a map. It is home. A fifth-generation Tejana and lifelong Fort Bend County resident, Ibáñez is now seeking to represent her community in Austin as the Democratic candidate for Texas House District 28.

Ibáñez grew up in a working-class family and has spoken openly about periods when her family struggled financially and relied on assistance from churches, nonprofit organizations and community programs. She says those experiences helped shape her views about public service and the importance of ensuring families have opportunities to become financially secure.

A graduate of Bush High School, Ibáñez earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Management and Entrepreneurship from the University of Houston's C.T. Bauer College of Business and Wolff Center for Entrepreneurship. She later earned an MBA from Western Governors University and completed Rice University's Advanced Management Program.

Her professional experience has crossed several fields. Ibáñez previously taught in Fort Bend ISD and has held positions in business and executive leadership. She currently works in commercial real estate and has also helped establish women's networking and mentorship groups focused on professional development and leadership.

Education has become a major focus of her campaign. Drawing upon her experience as a former Fort Bend ISD teacher, Ibáñez supports increased resources for public schools and teachers, school safety initiatives and expanded career and technical education, apprenticeships and other workforce pathways.

She has also identified affordability as a priority, including property taxes and rising home and automobile insurance costs. Other issues emphasized by her campaign include access to healthcare and mental-health services, infrastructure, flood control, reliable electricity and responsible growth as Fort Bend County's population continues to expand.

Ibáñez describes her approach as one centered on listening to residents and seeking practical solutions rather than allowing partisan politics to determine every decision.

As a Latina, educator, business professional and lifelong Fort Bend resident, Ibáñez brings a background rooted in the community she is asking to represent.

Israel Garcia:

A FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE GRADUATE
WITH DECADES IN HOUSTON LAW

For Israel B. Garcia Jr., a career in law and public service grew from a family story rooted in opportunity, education and the immigrant experience.

Garcia was born and raised in Austin. His father immigrated to the United States from Mexico and later became an American citizen, an event Garcia has described as an important moment for his family. Garcia went on to become the first member of his family to graduate from a university and obtain a professional license.

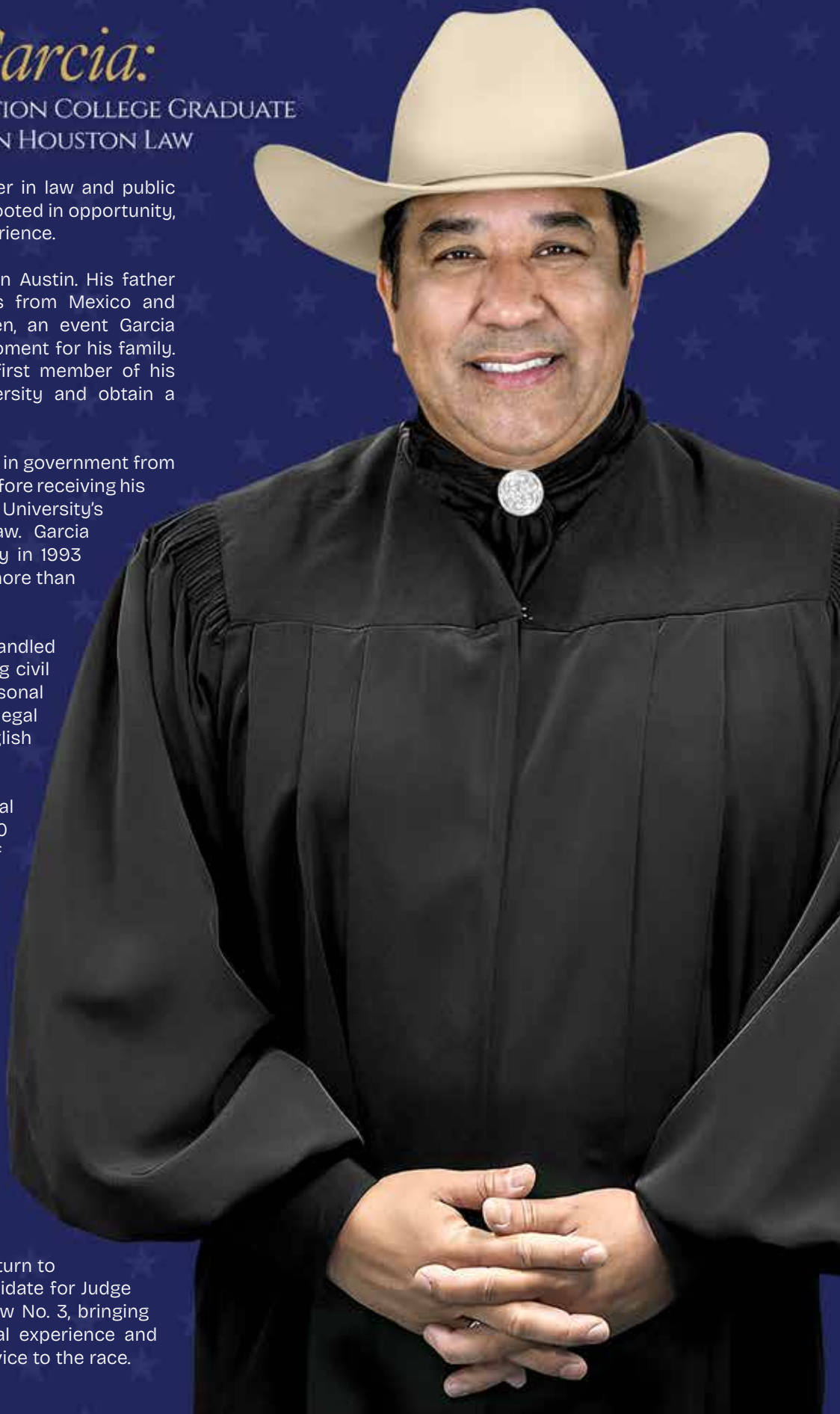
He earned a bachelor's degree in government from the University of Texas at Austin before receiving his law degree from Texas Southern University's Thurgood Marshall School of Law. Garcia became a licensed Texas attorney in 1993 and built a legal career spanning more than three decades.

As an attorney, Garcia has handled a broad range of matters, including civil and commercial litigation, personal injury, criminal cases and other legal disputes. He is also bilingual in English and Spanish.

Garcia entered elected judicial service after winning the 2020 race for Harris County Justice of the Peace, Precinct 5, Place 1. He served on the bench from January 2021 through December 2024, presiding over one of Harris County's busiest justice courts.

His community involvement has included serving as legal counsel to LULAC Council 402, an organization with a strong emphasis on education and scholarships for Houston-area students. Garcia has also spoken to students about the importance of pursuing higher education.

In 2026, Garcia is seeking a return to the bench as the Republican candidate for Judge of Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 3, bringing more than three decades of legal experience and four years of previous judicial service to the race.





Daniel Wong:

FROM IMMIGRANT DREAMER
TO FORT BEND COUNTY JUDGE

Dr. Daniel Wong's journey to public service began far from Fort Bend County. Originally from Macau, China, Wong came to the United States as an immigrant and eventually made Texas his home, building a career that has combined engineering, business, education and civic leadership.

Wong earned bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in civil engineering from the University of Houston, as well as a master's degree in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary. He later founded an engineering firm that grew to more than 400 employees and 13 offices, working on major infrastructure, energy and development projects.

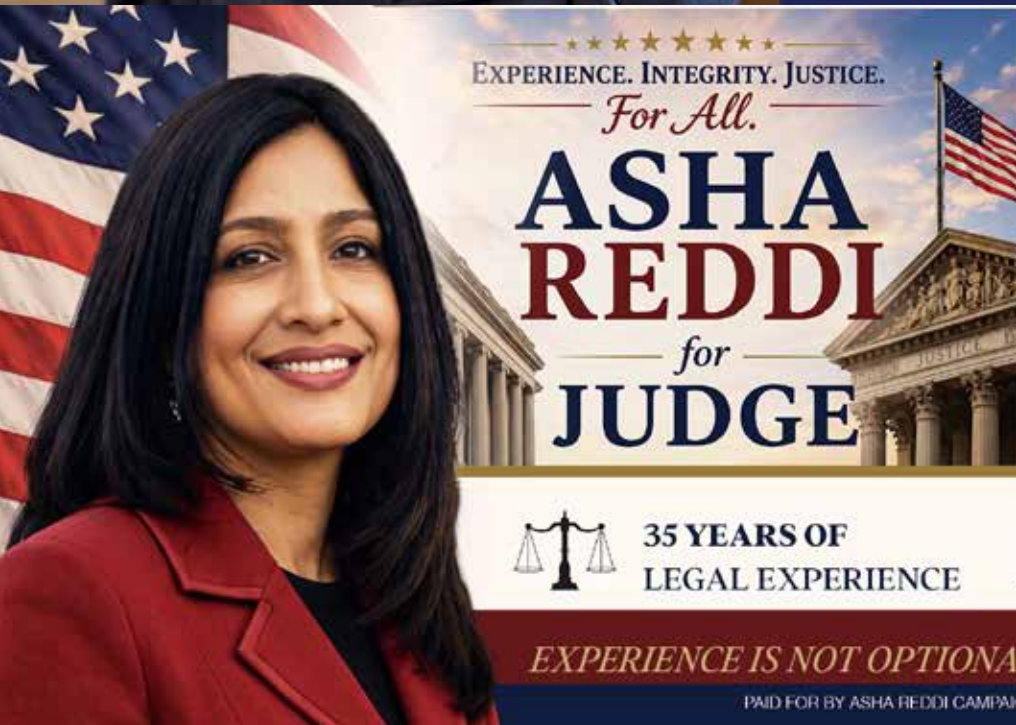
A Fort Bend County resident for approximately 35 years, Wong has held numerous leadership positions in the community. He served three terms as an at-large member of the Sugar Land City Council from 2002 to 2008 and spent two decades as a trustee of the Fort Bend Economic Development Council.

His public service has also included leadership with the Texas Board of Professional Engineers, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Greater Houston Partnership and regional transportation and infrastructure organizations.

In 2026, Wong became Fort Bend County Judge and is seeking election to the position in the November general election. His priorities include economic development, infrastructure and flood protection, public safety, education and workforce development.

Wong and his wife raised two sons in Fort Bend County and are now grandparents. He has also been active in his church, where he has served in leadership.

From arriving in America as an immigrant to becoming an engineer, entrepreneur and county judge, Wong's story has been shaped by education, faith, family and decades of service to the Fort Bend community.



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Maggie Jaramillo
FROM YOUNG IMMIGRANT TO THE
FORT BEND COUNTY BENCH

Judge Maggie Perez-Jaramillo's journey to the Fort Bend County bench began when she legally immigrated to the United States from Mexico with her parents at just nine years old.

After growing up in Los Angeles, Jaramillo married her husband, Jaime, a U.S. Marine, and raised two daughters while pursuing her education. She earned an associate degree from Arizona Western College and a bachelor's degree from Northern Arizona University before moving to Houston to attend Thurgood Marshall School of Law. She earned her law degree and became a licensed Texas attorney in 1997.

Jaramillo and her family settled in Fort Bend County in 1998. She established her own law practice and spent 17 years handling criminal, family, juvenile, probate and civil cases. She also taught as an adjunct professor at Thurgood Marshall School of Law.

Her judicial career began in 2014 when Gov. Rick Perry appointed her Judge of the 400th Judicial District Court. She later won election to the position and served through 2020. Jaramillo subsequently worked in the Fort Bend County District Attorney's Office and served as Associate Judge of the 268th District Court.

In December 2024, Gov. Greg Abbott appointed Jaramillo Judge of Fort Bend County's 458th Judicial District Court, effective January 1, 2025.

From arriving in America as a nine-year-old immigrant to becoming an attorney, professor and district court judge, Jaramillo's story reflects more than five decades of education, perseverance, family and public service.



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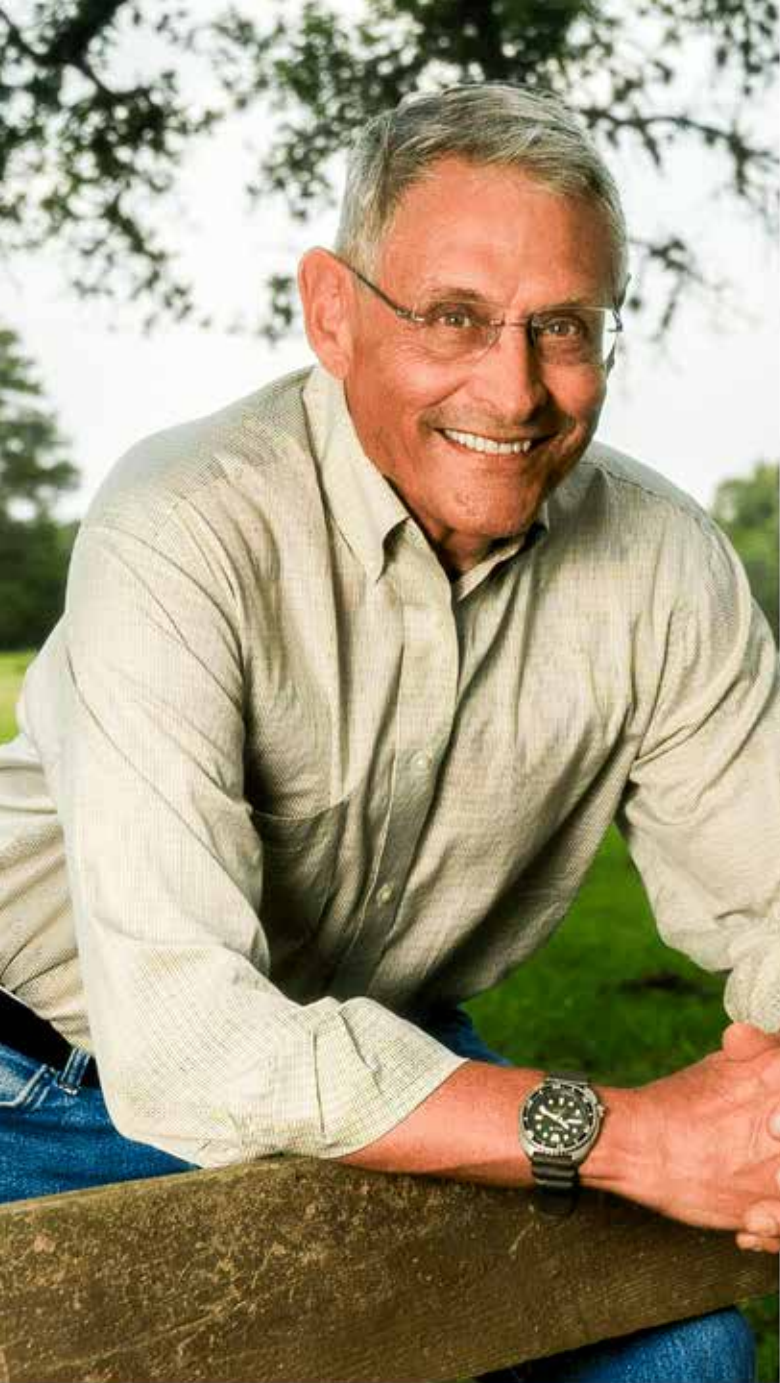
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Dennis "Goose" Geesaman:

FROM FIGHTER PILOT TO PUBLIC SERVICE

Dennis "Goose" Geesaman has spent much of his life in leadership roles, from the cockpit of a military aircraft to local government and now a campaign for the Texas Legislature. Geesaman is the Republican candidate for Texas House District 85, a district that includes portions of Fort Bend County and surrounding communities.

A graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, Geesaman earned an engineering degree before embarking on a lengthy military career. He retired from the U.S. Air Force as a lieutenant colonel after more than 20 years of service, including experience as a fighter pilot and fighter squadron commander.

Following his military career, Geesaman worked as a commercial airline pilot for Southwest Airlines and became involved in business, ranching and agriculture. He has described himself as a cow-and-calf and hay operator and also holds an MBA.

His public-service experience began at the local level. Geesaman served five terms on the Flatonia City Council and later served as mayor. He also helped establish the Flatonia Economic Development Corporation, giving him experience with the challenges facing smaller Texas communities and local businesses.

In his campaign for the Texas House, Geesaman has emphasized property-tax relief, government spending, election administration, education and parental involvement, infrastructure, economic development and strengthening domestic manufacturing. Geesaman is seeking to succeed State Rep. Stan Kitzman in House District 85. In the November 3 general election, he faces Democratic nominee Lawrence Brandyburg.

From military command and aviation to business, agriculture and municipal government, Geesaman is seeking to bring several decades of leadership experience to the Texas House of Representatives.



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JUDGE *Christopher Morales:*

A FORT BEND NATIVE WITH MORE
THAN A DECADE ON THE BENCH

For Judge Christopher G. Morales, Fort Bend County is more than the place where he serves on the bench. It is the community where he grew up, went to school, built his legal career, and has now spent more than a decade serving as Judge of County Court at Law No. 1.

A longtime Fort Bend County resident and graduate of B.F. Terry High School in Rosenberg, Morales attended Texas A&M University before earning his law degree from South Texas College of Law. Before becoming a judge, his legal career included work as an Assistant District Attorney in Fort Bend County, private civil litigation and operating his own law practice.

Morales was elected Judge of County Court at Law No. 1 in 2014 and subsequently reelected in 2018 and 2022. His court handles a broad docket that includes misdemeanor criminal cases, probate and guardianship matters, juvenile cases, civil litigation, condemnation proceedings and civil mental health commitments.

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One distinctive part of Morales' judicial work is his oversight of Fort Bend County's only Misdemeanor Mental Health Court. The specialized court is designed to address underlying mental-health needs among qualifying defendants while reducing repeat encounters with the criminal justice system.

Morales has also worked with the county's juvenile justice system and helped establish a GED graduation program recognizing educational achievement among young people involved with Juvenile Probation. In 2018, he was honored by the U.S. Army for his work with juveniles, and in 2022 he received Lone Star Legal Aid's Pro Bono Excellence Award for his continuing legal education work with local bar associations.

His service extends beyond his own courtroom. Morales has served as Administrative Judge for the Fort Bend County Courts at Law and on numerous county judicial boards and committees. He also serves on the Judicial Section Board of the State Bar of Texas.

Education remains another part of his career. On Monday evenings, Morales steps out of the judge's role and into the classroom as an adjunct professor at the University of Houston Law Center, where he teaches trial advocacy.

From growing up in Fort Bend County to practicing law and ultimately presiding over one of its courts, Morales' career has remained closely connected to the community he serves.

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PASTOR CÁRDENAS OF CHURCH ON THE ROCK, KATY, TX, HAS SPENT DECADES WALKING WITH FAMILIES IN FAITH

When a family at Church on the Rock receives difficult news, Pastor Jorge Cárdenas wants them to know they will not stand alone.

Sometimes the call comes from another state. Sometimes it comes from South America. A relative has died; a medical diagnosis has changed everything; a marriage is under strain. Perhaps a loved one is in a hospital bed, and the family has run out of words.

Cárdenas does not try to explain or preach away their suffering. Instead, he stays present with them, prays with them and walks beside them.



“We love you,” he tells them. “We don’t know what’s happened, but we’re walking this with you.”

That sentence has shaped much of his ministry in Katy, TX.

For 28 years, Cárdenas has led Church on the Rock with a steady focus on faith, family and presence. The church began in 1999 in a hotel, moved into a shopping center on Kingsland Boulevard and eventually built its current campus. Along the way, Cárdenas said the congregation became known for consistency.

“Our church is known for being steady,” he said.

That steadiness developed through years of ordinary ministry and through seasons that tested the church. Hurricane Harvey flooded the building and caused about \$1 million in damage. Cárdenas said believers from Texas and other states helped the church rebuild.

“We got to know more people in the body of Christ than ever,” he said.

Within 54 days, the church returned to regular services.

“That was a huge miracle,” he recalled.

Then came COVID. When churches faced restrictions on indoor gatherings, Church on the Rock adapted swiftly, moving its services outside. Families parked their cars on the church’s soccer field and listened to the service through their radios in a clever, “drive-in-theater” approach. The worship team led from a platform, while Cárdenas preached from a covered area. Some members brought lawn chairs and sat outside.

“You make the best out of difficult situations,” he said.

He recalled standing in the sun while preaching and finding humor in it.



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"How wonderful the Lord is," he laughed. "He allowed me to have a nice tan while preaching."

That combination of thoughtfulness, insight and warmth shows up often when Cárdenas speaks about ministry.

Before he became a pastor, he spent 10 years as a banker and another 10 years as an educator. He said he received the call to full-time ministry in 1999 and prepared for it with graduate studies in education, counseling and administration.

"I believe God used all of that to equip me for the work He called me to do here in Katy," he said.

Cárdenas was born in Colombia and came to the United States when he was 12. He grew up in Chicago and became a U.S. citizen in his 20s. His life as an immigrant shaped part of his ministry, especially as Church on the Rock serves many Spanish-speaking families and newcomers learning how to build a life in the United States.

"One thing I learned to cherish and love is this country," he said.

He said the church teaches its members to place God first, family next, then work and ministry. He also encourages newcomers to the U.S. to respect the country, understand its laws and become responsible members of their communities.



Cárdenas has been married to his wife, Olivia, for 50 years. They have three children and nine grandchildren.

As a family man, marriage ministry is one of the areas closest to his heart. Through counseling, follow-up and biblical teaching, Cárdenas described helping numerous couples strengthen their relationships and find healing before giving up.

Whenever he teaches at marriage conferences, he likes to begin with a line that gets everyone's attention.

"I've been married to Olivia for 50 years, and we never had a fight," he tells them.

Then he pauses.

"We never had a fight where Jesus did not intervene on our behalf to stay together," he said.

That joke encompasses Cárdenas: it is rooted in belief, with a twinkle of humor.

Church on the Rock describes its mission simply: "Go and make disciples." Its vision comes from Matthew 7:24, where Jesus describes the wise man who built his house on the rock.



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"We want to reach homes so they can build their homes upon the rock," Cárdenas said.

The church has also helped plant churches and ministry centers in Central and South America, with current work in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama. Cárdenas said the church focuses much of its mission work in the Spanish-speaking world because many members of the congregation can connect naturally there.

Locally, Church on the Rock has shared space with other congregations over the years, including Filipino, Portuguese, English-speaking and Spanish-speaking churches. Some began by meeting in the church's building during the week before growing into their own facilities.

"We're just happy to see that happening," he said.

Church on the Rock also has a Spanish-language seminary and works closely with The Bible Seminary in Katy for English-language ministry training.

In this season of his life, Cárdenas said he feels especially drawn to younger leaders.

"I love to spend my time and life and knowledge and experiences in ministry to young people, future pastors and future leaders," he said.

He also writes children's books, a project that began with his grandchildren. He has now published 11 books and works with illustrators to bring them to life. He said he prefers to keep that creative process personal and organic.

"I have a lot of respect, love and need, desperate need for the Holy Spirit," he said.

Still, when he talks about Church on the Rock, he returns to people.

When asked about the top struggle he sees affecting Christians today, he named the challenge of keeping faith strong through life's trials.

He talks about families facing sudden diagnoses, hospital stays, uncertainty and seasons when faith is tested. In those moments, people may wrestle with questions they are afraid to say out loud.

Cárdenas' approach to these seasons of adversity is to walk into hospital rooms, stay close to families and remind them that the church is there with them.

"Being able to walk with them in the difficult moments, that's what a church is for," he said.

Those moments, he said, often bring honest questions. "Why is this happening to us?" he said. "What have we done to deserve this?"

Cárdenas said the church's role is to stay present without rushing to give answers.

"You don't make any type of comments as to why something happens," he said. "That's the worst thing we can do to people."

He thinks of Job's friends in Scripture, who tried to explain suffering and made the pain worse.

"We love you," he tells families. "We don't know what's happened, but we're walking this with you."

That depth of care extends across generations. Cárdenas said Church on the Rock has ministries for children, adults and seniors, along with support for families facing health issues, mental health struggles and aging-related challenges such as Alzheimer's.

Every Wednesday, he leads a men's gathering where about 33 men come together for Bible study and a meal. Sometimes they order food. Sometimes someone cooks. The point is fellowship, Scripture and encouragement.

Cárdenas said men often carry responsibility without hearing simple words of affirmation.

"Thank you for providing," he listed. "Thank you for being a great example for the kids. Thank you for bringing the paycheck home. Thank you for taking the kids out to soccer."

He often ministers to men who go without those words, along with people who face their own unique crosses to bear.

For Cárdenas, community and care describe the church home he has worked to build since 1999. Church on the Rock, Katy, is a church where people are known, families are strengthened, faith is nurtured, and people can bring questions, weariness and difficult seasons without being treated like a problem to solve.

At the end of the day, he said, he hopes people know what they will find at Church on the Rock.

"[You will find that] we care for you," Cárdenas said. "We're not after your money. You're not a number to us. You're a family member."



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