



## ANNUAL REPORT

Laredo Chamber of Commerce 5702 McPherson Rd., Ste 8B Laredo, TX 78041 956-722-9895 www.laredochamber.com

## Our **Organization**

#### Membership

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce ends Fiscal Year 2023-2024 with a strong 768 members and is growing every day.

#### Governance

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce is completely autonomous. Although it maintains active membership in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, it is governed at the local level by a board made up of 24 elected and 8 appointed directors representative of the membership.

## Our **Vision**

## Our **Mission**

To be a trusted resource and partner for the business community by listening, educating, cultivating, and advancing our region through engaged leadership and advocacy.

We are a membership organization that provides leadership by connecting, building, and growing the economic interests of the business, tourism, and educational initiatives of the Laredo/Webb County Metropolitan area by being a politically proactive advocate, providing professional development and serving as a catalyst for emerging trends.

#### **History**

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce is the longest-running business organization in the Laredo/Webb County area. Formally registered with the Texas Secretary of State in 1915, it celebrated its 100th anniversary in April 2015. In 2023-2024, The Laredo Chamber of Commerce continued to lead the way for the local business community.



## Our **Leadership**

#### **Executive Committee**

- Adrian Zapata, PAD Specialists- Chairman of the Board
- · Gabriel Castillo, IBC Bank- Immediate Past-Chairman
- Sandra M. Alaniz, RE/MAX Real Estate Services- Chairwoman Elect
- Rossy Chase, PNC Bank- Secretary/Treasurer
- Gonzalo Prida, Multimodal Logistics- Council Chair
- · Catalina Dickerson, J.M. Dickerson Law Firm-Council Chair
- · Jorge Leal, Laredo Medical Center-Council Chair
- A.B. Barrera, AlphaGraphics/PMDG- Council Chair
- · Magali Rodriguez, Vaswani Group- Council Chair
- Monica Y. Martinez-Executive Director

#### Message from the Chairman

What a year!

Serving as Chairman of the Board for the Laredo Chamber of Commerce has been the opportunity of a lifetime. I want to thank the Board of Directors, committee members, volunteers, and chamber staff for trusting my vision to reimagine the Chamber's role in our community. Our mission is clear: we serve our members and the Laredo business community, and in doing so, we uplift all of Laredo.

This year, we embraced our history while pushing boundaries, expanding our influence locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. We set ambitious goals—to move faster, build higher, dream bigger, and execute at a higher level. I'm proud that the Chamber stepped up whenever action was needed. That's true leadership, and that's how we grow. As my term as Chairman ends, I'm excited for the future. I will continue raising the bar as Chairman of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce Foundation, our 501(c)(3) arm.

At this end-of-year celebration, I want to acknowledge and celebrate those who helped the Chamber reclaim its leadership position. As a boxing fan, I see this past year as the time when the Laredo Chamber of Commerce won its championship belt back. But the work doesn't stop here—I challenge all of us to keep striving to make Laredo better every day.

Adelante!

With gratitude,

Adrian Zapata
Chairman of the Board
2023-2024



## Board of **Directors**

Elizabeth Alonzo-Villarreal, NeighborWorks Kayla Alvarado, Killam Development Rene Arriaga, IBC Bank Andrew Carranco, Las Lomas Properties Miriam Castillo, City of Laredo Veronica Castillon, Laredo I.S.D. Erika Cavazos-Juarez, UT Houston Rosa Cruz, PNC Bank David Dodier, PNC Bank Cesar Garay, Southern Distributing Billy Hrncir, Dosis Coffee Elmo Daniel Lopez, Laredo Physicians Group Mike Marasco, McDonald's of Laredo Jaime Mendiola, LNF Distributors Diana Ortiz, Laredo College Scott Payne, KGNS Abelina Perez Veliz, Texas Community Bank

David Puig, Vantage Bank
Imelda Rodriguez, Falcon Bank
Priscilla Salinas, Laredo Medical Center
Henry Sauvignet, IBC
Andy Segovia, Ascending Technologies
Gloria Solis, Serenity Home Care Services
Olivia Varela, Individual member
David Kash Vasquez, Gateway Community
Health Center

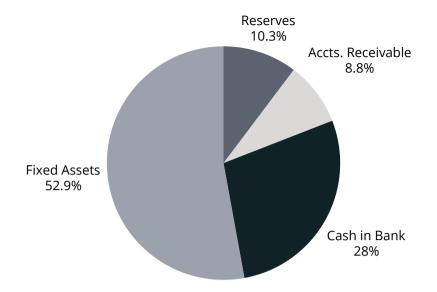
#### **Did You Know?**

Board Member Priscilla Salinas has been a chamber member for over 20 years. As a chamber member, she has had the opportunity to be serve on several committees, including the Bienvenidos committee, Membership Committee, Youth Leadership Laredo Committee, School Bell Award Committee, Leadership Laredo (Elevate) Committee, Bola Blanca Golf Committee, and Health Services Committee.

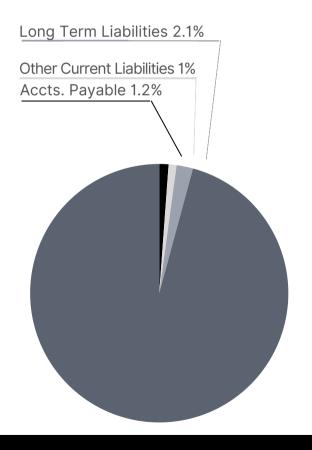
"Being a chamber member has helped me build strong relationships with other members and local business owners through my involvement. It has also allowed me to give back to my community and contribute to its growth and success. I highly recommend becoming a chamber member to anyone looking to make a positive impact in their community and build valuable connections," said Priscilla.



#### **Assets**



#### Liabilities



#### **Membership Fees**

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce membership fees constituted approximately 25% of its total operating income in 2023-2024. Dues billing YTD (as of 08/31/2024) totaled \$228,994.76. New and reinstated accounts, which totaled 159, accounted for \$52,095

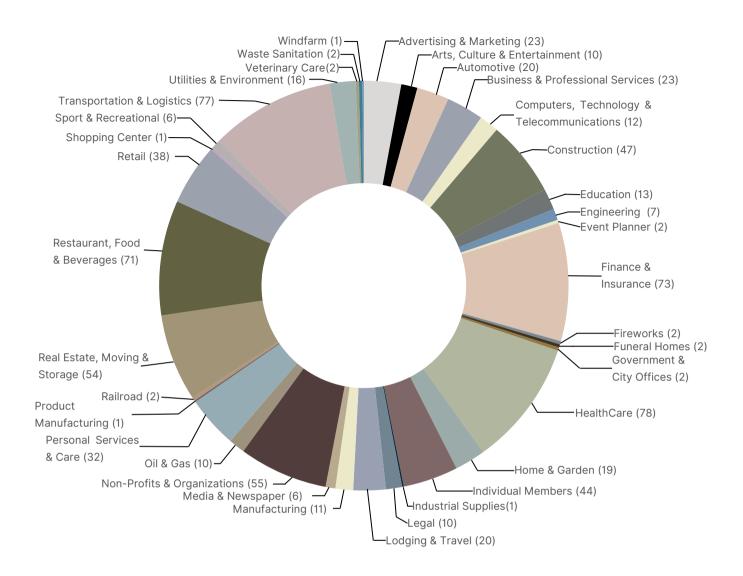
#### **Non Dues**

The Chamber generated additional 32% of revenue for its operating budget from "Non Dues." This is a term that applies to any source of revenue not stemming from membership dues. Non Dues are generated through fundraising activities, donations, fees delivery of services, and sales of promotional material or ads for publications. In 2024, the Chamber generated a total of \$361,585.27 in Non-Dues Income

#### **Contracts**

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce managed two contracts in 2023-2024, apart from the operating budget. The first contract was for tourism and promotion for Webb County, worth \$150,000. The second contract was for the City of Laredo for advertising and promotion of the Cola Blanca Big Buck Contest, for \$35,000.

## Our **Numbers**



#### 600 Our **Membership** 513 500 We have a diverse 36 categories that make up our membership with 400 the largest category being Healthcare, with 78 300 members. Contributing to the growth and 200 strength of our membership, we have 513 members with 1-15 employees, a true testament to the strength of small businesses in our community.

## Our Performance

The Chamber's committees are vital in executing the annual work program. Not only do they provide a volunteer work force, but they contribute as a revenue source for the Chamber's annual budget. In 2023-2024, with the support of its committees, the Chamber successfully delivered a variety of programs/activities.



#### **Small Business Committee**

Under the leadership of Imelda Rodriguez, the Small Business Committee made this a year of vibrant community engagement and support for local businesses.

Small Business Saturday (November 25, 2023) was marked by an exciting outdoor market, featuring over 50 vendors offering a unique blend of shopping, entertainment, and family fun.

In Small Business Week (May 1-5, 2024), a series of initiatives aimed at empowering local businesses took place. Highlights included the Small Business Expo at the Falcon Event Center, where attendees connected with industry experts, learned from dynamic presentations, and gained valuable insights. The week also featured a Small Business Week Mixer, fostering networking opportunities among business owners, while multiple businesses were showcased in our Business Spotlights across social media.

Earlier in the year, the Spring into Business Market (April 6, 2024) brought together the community at Las Palmas Food Trucks & Park, offering another day filled with lively shopping, entertainment, and family activities.

#### **Business ICON Awards**

On September 12, 2024, the Small Business Committee proudly hosted the 2024 Business ICONS Awards, celebrating exceptional entrepreneurs and businesses in our community. This year's awards recognized achievements in four key categories:

- Healthcare Business of the Year: The Cigarroa Clinic
- Non-Profit Organization of the Year: Laredo Heat Soccer Club and Academy
- Small Business of the Year: Quantum Construction
- Business Person of the Year: Cliffe Killam

The event drew over 325 attendees, reflecting the strong support for local businesses. With gross revenue of \$103,000 and expenses totaling approximately \$48,000, the committee achieved an impressive net gain of approximately \$55,000.



#### Lights, Camera, Action

For the second year in a row, the Small Business committee worked hard to merge the Small Business Awards and Business Person of the Year. By hosting the awards, the Chamber not only honors individual businesses but also fosters a sense of community. encouraging collaboration and growth among local enterprises. The Laredo Chamber highlights the importance of small businesses in driving local economies.

## Member Services

Under the leadership of Linda Flores, the Bienvenidos Committee had a successful year, hosting 50 ribbon cuttings, 4 groundbreaking ceremonies, one anniversary event, and one welcome event. This impressive lineup of activities was supported by Natalia Garcia, Member Sales & Relations Coordinator, with assistance from Karla Rojas, who spearheaded a strong outreach initiative through social media. Throughout the year, the committee focused on enhancing existing ribbon-cutting services, introducing new events such as welcome and anniversary ceremonies, and actively recruiting and engaging both new and long-standing members. Additionally, the committee launched new initiatives, including recognizing milestone anniversaries and selecting an Ambassador of the Month to honor dedicated volunteers.

The Membership Committee, chaired by Scott Payne, also made significant strides. Throughout the year, the committee worked closely with Chamber staff to refine and expand the services offered to members. Among the top priorities is the integration of an online mapping service that highlights all Chamber members, aimed at strengthening the Chamber's digital presence within the community.









#### **Outreach**

Throughout the year the Chamber maintained contact with its membership through its electronic system of communication. The weekly Member News & Upcoming Events

delivered constant updates; the Chamber and Cola Blanca websites provided relevant information to members and the public; and the new interactive data system, Growth Zone offered instant access to members' business accounts.

## **Entertainment & Hospitality Committee**



Under the leadership of Rene Arriaga, the Entertainment & Hospitality Committee prioritized creating a vibrant and engaging experience for all members. For the first time in its history, the Laredo Chamber proudly participated in the WBCA festivities, joining the IBC Youth Parade Under the Stars and the Anheuser-Busch Grand Parade on February 15 and 17, 2024. The committee fostered member connections and community spirit by hosting multiple mixers throughout the year. In addition to these networking events, the committee successfully organized six "Coffee with the Chairman" sessions, where our Chairman of the Board, Adrian Zapata, engaged in meaningful discussions with members of the community.

The holidays were truly memorable, thanks to the Entertainment and Hospitality Committee's organization of the Annual Mingle & Jingle holiday party on December 1, 2023. Hosted at TRU by Hilton, the event was packed with fun, entertainment, raffle prizes, and great food. With over 100 guests in attendance, this free event was a resounding success, leaving everyone in the holiday spirit!









#### **Cola Blanca Big Buck Contest & Clay Shoot**

In 2023-2024, the Cola Blanca Big Buck Contest drew over 400 rifle and bow hunters throughout the fall and winter seasons. Chaired by Oscar Caballero, the committee honored winners across more than 40+ categories for men, women, youth, and archery, and open divisions at the annual Awards Pachanga on August 24, 2024, at the 1848 Event Center. Organized by Gwen Chandarlis and the committee, the event was a hit with over 400 attendees, many of whom traveled from outside Webb County. The ceremony featured an exhibit area, raffle prizes, great food, and plenty of fun. The contest is projected to gross over \$90,000.

(Note: The City of Laredo and Webb County's third-party contracts provide funding that supplements the contest's marketing and promotional efforts.)



The Cola Blanca committee continues to reenergize the contest by adding events and entertainment. They held a successful Sporting Clays Shoot on May 18, 2024, at the South Texas Shooting Complex. Promoted in surrounding communities, this year's Clay Shoot was sold out and registered over 125 participants, including teams from surrounding counties and Mexico. The event also included a shotgun raffle which proved to be a huge success among participants. The event grossed over \$18,274.50

#### **What Next?**

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce remains committed to its mission of fostering trade, commerce, and business growth in the Laredo and Webb County communities. Promoting tourism, outdoor sports, and recreational activities continues to be a top priority in our efforts to enhance the region's economic vitality.





## Annual Bola Blanca Chamber Classic

The Bola Blanca Golf Tournament, held on March 23, 2024, at the Casa Blanca Golf Course, was a resounding success. This year, AlphaGraphics stepped in as the Title Sponsor once more, showcasing an innovative marketing campaign that leveraged the exceptional talent and creativity of the PMDG team. Under the leadership of tournament chair Jorge Leal, the event attracted more than 120 enthusiastic participants.

The tournament generated impressive gross income of \$42,670, with expenses amounting to \$25,448.39. This led to a net gain of \$17,221.61, further solidifying the tournament's reputation as a premier event in the community. Overall, the Bola Blanca Golf Tournament not only delivered a fantastic day of golf but also demonstrated the power of collaboration and creativity in making a positive impact.

#### **VISION Conference**

The VISION economic outlook conference was held on May 21-22, 2024 at the beautiful downtown campus of Laredo College. Chaired by Paco Barrientos, the committee secured esteemed presenters to bring the most relevant and up-to-date information to our business community. Speakers included:

- Adriana Cruz, Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Texas Economic Development & Tourism.
- Daniel Covarrubias, Ph.D., Director of the Texas Center for Border Economic and Enterprise Development at Texas A&M International University,
- Jesus Canas, Senior Business Economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas,
- Allen Gina, Co-Founder of CT Strategies and Former Assistant Commissioner for International Trade at U.S. Customs Border and Protection (CBP),
- David Earl of Earl & Associates, Talise,
- Dr. Victor Trevino, Mayor-City of Laredo
- · Joseph Neeb, City Manager- City of Laredo

We were also fortunate enough to have the most accurate and relevant information presented in the annual Economic Outlook Report prepared and presented by Dr. Daniel Covarrubias. Gross income was \$71,000.00 and expenses totaled \$17,250.57. With a net gain of \$53, 749. 43, the event proved to be one of the most successful throughout the fiscal year.









## Our Advocacy

Advocacy for the business community is one of Laredo Chamber's top priorities. Led by Andrew Carranco, the Governmental Affairs Committee spearheaded various inititives througout the year and forged partnerships with multiple entities.



#### **Government Relations Committee**

Our involvement in advocating for the business community was of vital interest to Chamber members. Committee members and other supporters joined the City of Laredo on March 4-7, 2024, on its annual Legislative Trip to the nation's capital. The Chamber delegation carried forth a list of legislative priorities as it visited with government officials and agencies of interest. The program included a lunch meeting with Senator John Cornyn, co-hosted with J.D. Gonzalez. This provided an opportunity to chat with the senator in an informal setting, as well as a visit with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce where the delegation met with experts on various business-related issues and the border area. There were also meetings with the French and Mexican Embassies, as well as multiple other government agencies. For the first time ever, the Chamber hosted a private reception, sponsored by Talise.

The Breakfast with the Mayor and Community Leaders monthly series once more formed part of the Chamber's annual plan of work and included the participation of host Robert Summers. The committee maintained its legislative efforts throughout the year by convening with representatives of other local business organizations like LEDC, LAR, LLUSCBA, ALFA, and LMCA to help identify issues of importance to the local business community. Dr. Victor Trevino, Mayor of the City of Laredo, was joined by various community leaders who shared their insights as well. Guest speakers included Council Members Alyssa Cigarroa, Vanessa Perez, and Ruben Gutierrez. County Commissioner Jesse Gonzalez, State Representative Richard Raymond, and U.S. Congressman Henry Cuellar were also part of the vital discussions.

The committee was also able to host a private lunch and conversation with Nuevo Leon Governor Samuel Garcia on March 1, 2024, in which he gave a presentation and valuable insights into the expansion of projects of the Port of Entry Colombia-Laredo, Nuevo Leon's cutting-edge infrastructure, diverse production plants and much more. Members from Earl & Associates and Forum CRE were also able to highlight the remarkable growth of industrial parks and the master-planned development of Talise.

On April 17, 2024, we hosted a successful reception for esteemed guests from the French Embassy in Washington D.C., including Jean-Roald L'Hermitte, Customs Advisor for North America, and his deputy Florian Laree. Industry leaders and members of the chamber convened to discuss pivotal trade and customs matters.





#### Why it matters

Advocacy for the business community is one of Laredo Chamber's top priorities. Led bv Andrew Carranco. **Affairs** Governmental Committee spearheaded various inititives througout the year and forged partnerships with multiple entities. The Laredo Chamber of Commerce unifies businesses of all sizes, giving them a stronger voice when addressing local, state, and national governments. A single business may struggle to influence policy, but when multiple businesses join forces, their concerns and suggestions carry more weight. This collective power ensures that issues like infrastructure, labor laws, and trade policies are addressed in a way that benefits the broader business community.

## External Contracts

In 2023-2024, the Laredo Chamber once again partnered with Webb County and the City of Laredo to manage contracts funded by the Hotel/Motel Tax. These funds are specifically allocated for marketing and promotional activities.

- You'd Be Surprised!" Campaign This campaign, funded by Webb County with \$150,000, targets key markets such as hunters, outdoor sports enthusiasts, and bird watchers, as well as U.S. and Mexican tourists and corporate visitors. Originally launched in 2019, the Chamber created the "You'd Be Surprised!" campaign to establish Webb County as a destination for visitors. Due to its success, promotional efforts for the campaign continued in 2023-2024 using a variety of strategies to further its reach.
- City Contract Supporting Cola Blanca In 2024, the Laredo Chamber also managed a \$35,000 contract funded by the City of Laredo Hotel/Motel Tax in support of the Cola Blanca Contest. This contract helped supplement revenue generated by the contest, covering partial personnel costs, media advertising, and contest prizes.

These efforts reflect the Chamber's ongoing commitment to promoting the region as a vibrant and attractive destination.





# Laredo Chamber Foundation

Laredo Chamber of Commerce Foundation is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization serving as the educational hub for the Laredo Chamber of Commerce and its members. The Chamber Foundation powers multiple programs and initiatives that spark Community and Economic Development by creating a stronger, more educated workforce in the Laredo region. Current Chamber Foundation programs include:

- Business Development Certification
   Program
- School Bell Awards
- Spirit of Laredo Scholarship competition
- Elevate Laredo
- Youth Leadership Laredo

## Our Leadership

Stronger Together, the Laredo Chamber of Commerce Foundation has a diverse group of Board Directors consisting of leaders from multiple lines of business in the Laredo community. Board Directors for 2024-2025 include:

- Adrian Zapata: Chairman Business Executive, PAD Specialists
- Sandra Alaniz: Chair-Elect Broker/Owner, RE/MAX Real Estate Services
- Elizabeth Alonzo-Villarreal: Secretary/Treasurer Chief Executive Officer, NeighborWorks Laredo
- Rossy Chase: Director at Large Vice-President: Corporate Relationship Manager, PNC Bank
- John Kilburn: Director at Large Professor, Texas A&M International University
- Gilbert Narvaez: Director at Large President, Falcon International Bank
- Dalia Martinez: Director at Large Executive Vice President Operations, IBC Bank
- Guillermo Trevino: Director at Large President, Southern Distributing
- Werner Johnson: Director at Large General Manager, Ancira Volkswagen of Laredo

#### **Business Development Certification Program**

Chaired by Jesus Ramirez, the Business Development Certification Committee focused on promoting innovative professional development practices for Chamber members. Proudly sponsored by Falcon Bank, the committee developed the annual Business Development Certification Program, offering a series of nine professional development seminars at no cost to Chamber members. These seminars provided education on the latest business practices, tips for exceptional service, and strategies to foster a positive image within the Laredo community.

The program's success was evident, with over 22 business professionals volunteering their time to present to more than 380 attendees. Among them, 21 individuals successfully graduated from the program by attending more than 80% of the seminars. Of the graduates, 13 were female and 8 were male. The diverse range of graduates included six from the banking/finance sector, five from healthcare, three from welding/construction, three from the hotel industry, two from real estate, and two self-employed individuals, highlighting the wide spectrum of industries represented.

In our ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity and expand our reach, we are excited to announce the launch of our *BDCP en Español* in the coming fiscal year.









#### **Education Committee**

The Education Committee, chaired by Veronica Castillon and Dr. Diana Y. Ortiz, delivered the following:

#### School Bell Awards

On April 30, 2024, in collaboration with Laredo College, Sames Laredo Chevrolet, Killam Development, McDonald's of Laredo, and PNC Bank, the committee recognized 13 exemplary educators, representative of all levels of the local education spectrum in the private and public school setting, by presenting them with the School Bell Award. Sames Laredo Chevrolet and Killam Development, in addition, combined to present each honoree with a \$500 monetary reward. The recipients also received a gift basket from McDonald's The committee grossed \$6,650.00 in revenue and expended \$4,951.70 for the contest, netting \$1,698.30. All other expenses were covered by sponsors in-kind.

#### Spirit of Laredo Video Competition

The Spirit of Laredo Competition, designed to inspire local high school students to showcase pride in their community and explore careers that contribute to a better Laredo, attracted 14 video entries this year. The winners were Diego Gorecki from United High School (1st place), Damian Carrizales from Cigarroa High School (2nd place), and Liliana Martinez from LBJ High School (3rd place). They were awarded scholarships of \$2,000, \$1,000, and \$500, respectively, courtesy of Killam Development and the Education Committee. Past winners Joshua Ramos, Kayla P. Martinez, and Jose Saucedo also attended the event, offering their insights and sharing their experiences with the current participants.





#### **Youth Leadership Laredo**

Youth Leadership Laredo (YLL), a 5-year program and flagship initiative of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce Foundation, is dedicated to forging the next generation of community leaders. This transformative program empowers students to become confident, goal-driven, and self-motivated leaders, equipping them with the skills and mindset necessary to achieve personal excellence and make a lasting impact on their communities.

Under the leadership of Yaritza Mendoza and Adrian Zapata, the Youth Leadership Laredo program saw 153 students participate during the 2023-2024 academic year. Of these students, 80.39% came from low to moderate-income families. Throughout the year, participants engaged in a variety of enriching experiences.

They explored the history of Laredo through a downtown tour, gained insights into communications and marketing during a media tour at KGNS studios, took part in a federal mock trial, and learned about the medical field at the UT Health Science Center. In addition to these activities, students developed leadership and financial literacy skills through a series of workshops.

Seventeen graduating seniors from the Class of 2024 successfully completed the five-year program and were awarded \$500 scholarships during the end-of-year awards ceremony on May 15, 2024. These scholarships were possible by the generous sponsorships of IBC Bank, Falcon Bank, City of Laredo Economic Development Department, KGNS TV, Multimodal Logistics, Laredoans Against Drunk Driving, and Chase Welding Services.

#### **Elevate Laredo**

Elevate Laredo (formally Leadership Laredo) came back strong after a 15-year absence. Founded in 1986, the first graduating class consisted of 24 graduates. Under the leadership of A.B. Barrera, the program aimed to provide citizens with an opportunity to learn about Laredo, its rich history, and provide a platform that empowers and educates emerging and current leaders to elevate our community and engage in opportunities and challenges facing our bicultural border region.

Since its inception, the program has graduated over 25 classes including over 500 graduates. The prestigious curriculum engaged numerous local professionals. Its class rosters include many local elected officials, education leaders, banking professionals, and more.

In 2023-2024, the Elevate Laredo class had 19 participants from various professional backgrounds. Sessions included a variety of topics including leadership, culture, transportation and infrastructure, education and workforce development, health and human services, government and more. The graduation for the Class of 2024 took place on October 2, 2024, at the Laredo Country Club. Applications are being accepted for the Class of 2025.

## Be Part of Our Family

Becoming a member of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce is a valuable investment for any business, providing access to a vast network of resources, connections, and advocacy that can enhance growth and visibility. Membership offers opportunities for professional development, marketing support, and collaboration with other local businesses, all of which can drive success.

By volunteering with the Chamber, you can play an active role in shaping the business community, influencing policy, and addressing local challenges. Your involvement not only amplifies your business's voice but also allows you to contribute to initiatives that promote economic development and foster a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Together, members can create a stronger, more supportive environment for all businesses to thrive.



956-722-9895



info@laredochamber.com



www.laredochamber.com



facebook.com/laredochamber



instagram.com/laredochamber



https://www.linkedin.com/in/laredo-chamber-of-commerce-1140a923b/

## **Meet Our Team**



Monica Y. Martinez

Executive Director

monica@laredochamber.com



Briseida San Miguel
Accounts & Payroll Manager
brizzy@laredochamber.com



Gwen Chandarlis
Special Projects Coordinator
gwen@laredochamber.com



Natalia Garcia

Member Sales &
Relations Coordinator

membership@laredochamber.com



Karla Rojas

Administrative Assistant and Membership Liaison info@laredochamber.com



R. Alejandro Silva

Administrative Assistant &

Billing Clerk

membership2@laredochamber.com































