



**LaredoChamber**  
of Commerce

# ANNUAL REPORT

**2024 – 2025**



Laredo Chamber of Commerce  
5702 McPherson Rd., Suite 8B  
Laredo, TX 78041  
956-722-9895  
[www.laredochamber.com](http://www.laredochamber.com)



**CONNECTING,  
BUILDING, &  
ADVOCATING  
FOR BUSINESSES  
SINCE 1915**

## OUR ORGANIZATION

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce closed Fiscal Year 2024–2025 with a strong membership base of 832 members and counting, reflecting steady growth and continued confidence in our mission. As a fully autonomous organization, the Chamber operates independently while maintaining active affiliation with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Governance is carried out locally by a dedicated Board of Directors composed of 24 elected and 8 appointed representatives, ensuring broad representation of our diverse membership and community.



### OUR VISION

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

### OUR MISSION

To provide leadership by connecting, building, advocating for, and growing the economic interests of business, tourism, and education of the Laredo/Webb County area while acting as a catalyst for emerging trends.

## OUR LEADERSHIP

### Executive Committee

- Sandra M. Alaniz, RE/MAX Real Estate Services- Chairwoman
- Rossy Chase, PNC Bank- Chairwoman Elect
- Magali Rodriguez, Vaswani Group- Secretary/Treasurer
- Adrian Zapata, PAD Specialists- Immediate Past Chairman
- Rene Arriaga, IBC Bank- Council Chair
- A.B. Barrera, AlphaGraphics/PMDG- Council Chair
- Andrew Carranco, Las Lomas Properties- Council Chair
- Jorge Leal, Laredo Medical Center- Council Chair
- Imelda Rodriguez, Falcon Bank- Council Chair
- Monica Y. Martinez-Executive Director

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRWOMAN



Serving as Chairwoman of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce has truly been the experience of a lifetime. There were moments when the work was incredibly rewarding, when I could see, feel, and know that we were making a difference. And yes, there were also moments when I felt defeated, when I questioned if I was doing enough. But here's the truth, this was never about me. This was about you. About Laredo. About the business community that drives our economy forward. About the people who get up every morning with a dream, take a risk, and build something that strengthens us all.

Through the ups and downs, I've watched new businesses take root and flourish. I've seen how we show up for one another, how we extend a helping hand, share resources, and celebrate each other's wins. That's the heart of Laredo. That's the bigger picture. When I think about the honor of serving as the face of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, I realize how much this role has changed me. I leave as a different woman, humbled, grateful, and deeply proud to have been one of the few women to lead this organization. I am proud to have served our members, and I thank you for trusting me with this responsibility.

It truly takes an army to keep the Chamber thriving. And that army is our volunteers. Your selfless dedication, your time, and your relentless effort are the lifeblood of this Chamber. Without you, our programs, events, and initiatives would simply not be possible. To put it in perspective, there are 365 days in a year, and the Chamber hosts 277 days of events. That's impact. That's commitment.

On a personal note, serving as Chairwoman has also been a family legacy. I am honored to follow in the footsteps of my father, Elias Mendiola Jr., who served as a volunteer in the 1980s and 90s.

As we move forward, we celebrate a monumental moment in Chamber history, the first all-female passing of the gavel. Congratulations, Rossy Chase. I look forward to supporting you in your new role and watching you lead with passion and vision.

I want to thank the Executive Committee, our Board, our membership, the Chamber staff, my incredible team at RE/MAX, my husband, and my parents for their unwavering support. Our Chamber staff executes with unmatched precision, and our community has noticed. Together, we are making a difference, always meeting and often exceeding expectations.

As I pass the torch, know that my heart remains here, with Laredo, with this Chamber, and with the incredible people who make it all possible. Because in the end, it's not just about building business, it's about building each other, building Laredo, and building a legacy that will outlast us all.

**Sandra Mendiola Alaniz**  
**Chairwoman of the Board**  
**2024-2025**



# 2024-2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Alaniz, Sandra M.**  
RE/MAX Real Estate Services



**Alonzo-Villarreal, Elizabeth**  
NeighborWorks Laredo



**Alvarado, Kayla**  
Killam Development Co.



**Arriaga, Rene**  
IBC Bank



**Audiffred, Hugo**  
Coca-Cola Southwest Beverages



**Barrera, A.B.**  
AlphaGraphics Laredo



**Buitron, Oscar**  
Clear Choice ER



**Carranco, Andrew**  
Las Lomas Properties



**Castillo, Miriam**  
City of Laredo



**Castillon, Veronica**  
Laredo ISD



**Ceballos, Bianca**  
PNC Bank



**Chase, Rossy**  
PNC Bank



**Dowler, Ashley**  
Doctors Hospital of Laredo



**Flores, Linda**  
Falcon Bank

## DID YOU KNOW?

Chamber Board service is 100% voluntary – a testament to the commitment of local leaders who dedicate their time and expertise to strengthen Laredo's business community.

# 2024 - 2025

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Garay, Cesar**  
Andrews Distributing



**Heather, Justin**  
Killam Development



**Kraus, AJ**  
Kraus Development



**Leal, Jorge**  
Laredo Medical Center



**Lopez, Elmo Daniel**  
Laredo Physicians Group



**MacDonald, Reagan**  
Texas Community Bank



**Martinez, Jeronimo**  
Cresta Advisors



**Mendiola, Jaime**  
L&F Distributors



**Ortiz, Dr. Diana**  
Laredo College



**Payne, Scott**  
KGNS TV



**Perez, Elizabeth**  
Webb County



**Rodriguez, Imelda**  
Falcon Bank



**Rodriguez, Magali**  
Vaswani Group



**Rodriguez, Norma**  
TAMIU SBDC



**Salinas, Priscilla**  
Laredo Medical Center



**Sauvignet, Henry**  
IBC Bank



**Segovia, Andy**  
Ascending Technologies



**Solis, Gloria**  
Trauma Therapy of  
South TX



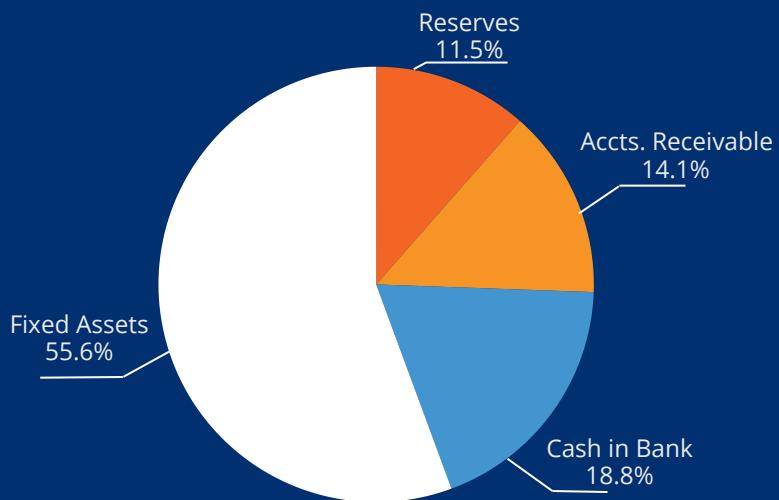
**Vasquez, David K.**  
Gateway Community  
Health Center



**Zapata, Adrian**  
PAD Specialists

# OUR NUMBERS

## Assets



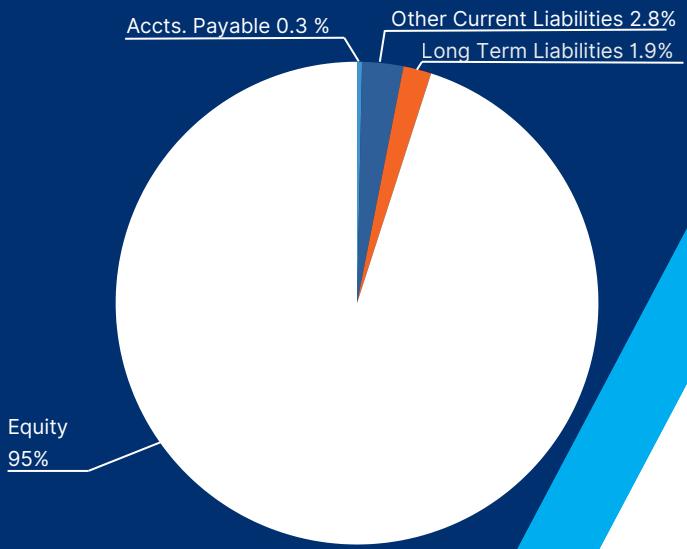
## NON DUES REVENUE

Beyond membership dues, the Chamber generated an additional 42.6% of its operating revenue through non-dues income — revenue streams that diversify and strengthen our financial foundation. Non-dues income is derived from fundraising events, sponsorships, donations, service fees, and the sale of promotional materials and publication ads. In 2025, these activities produced a total of \$387,371.02, reflecting the Chamber's ability to create value and impact well beyond traditional membership.

## MEMBERSHIP FEES

In Fiscal Year 2024–2025, membership dues represented approximately 35% of the Chamber's total operating income, underscoring the vital role our members play in sustaining the organization. As of August 31, 2025, dues billing totaled \$316,041.21. Notably, 144 new and reinstated accounts contributed \$59,850, highlighting both growth and renewed engagement within our membership base.

## Liabilities

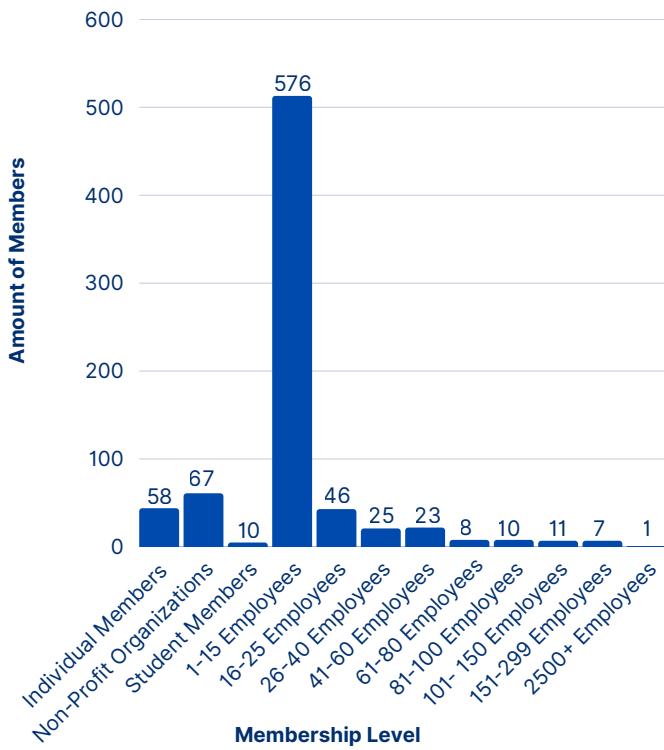


## BEYOND THE BUDGET

In addition to its operating budget, the Laredo Chamber of Commerce successfully managed two external contracts during Fiscal Year 2024–2025. The first, a \$150,000 contract with Webb County, supported countywide tourism and promotional initiatives. The second, a \$35,000 contract with the City of Laredo, funded advertising and promotional efforts for the Chamber's signature Cola Blanca Big Buck Contest. These contracts reflect the Chamber's role as a trusted partner in advancing both tourism and community traditions.



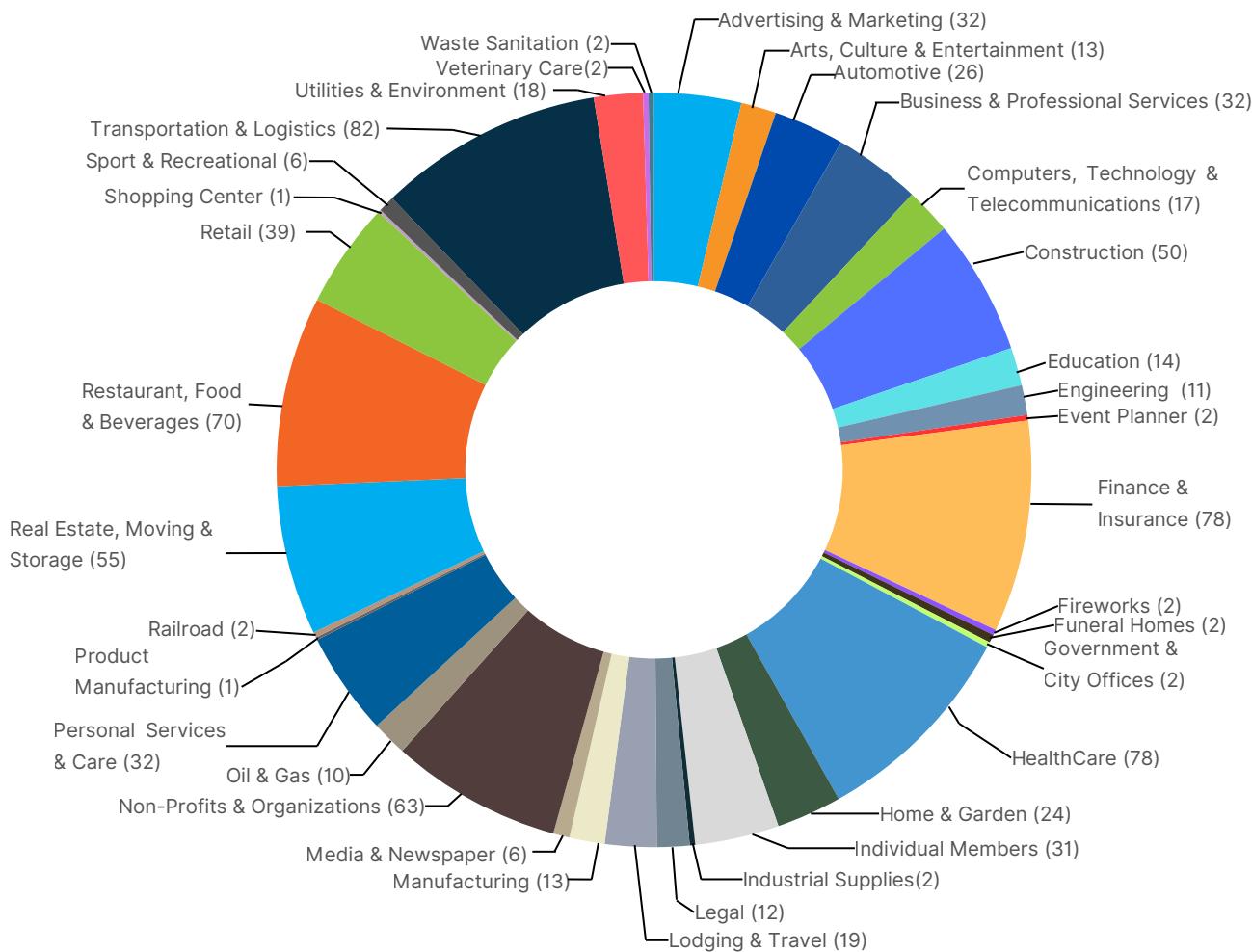
# OUR MEMBERSHIP



The Laredo Chamber of Commerce is proud to serve as a home for businesses of every size and industry. Our membership spans 35 diverse categories, reflecting the full spectrum of Laredo's economy. The largest sector, Transportation & Logistics, accounts for 83 members, underscoring the city's role as the nation's leading port of entry.

Small businesses remain the heartbeat of our organization, with 576 members employing 1-15 employees. Their entrepreneurial spirit drives innovation, creates jobs, and strengthens the local economy. At the same time, the Chamber also represents mid-size and large employers, ensuring that companies with workforces of every scale find value, advocacy, and connection through membership.

Together, this broad mix of businesses makes the Chamber a true crossroads of commerce — where entrepreneurs, growing enterprises, and industry leaders come together to collaborate, advocate, and build a stronger Laredo.



# OUR PERFORMANCE

The Chamber's committees play a vital role in carrying out the annual program of work. They not only provide the volunteer leadership and energy that drive our initiatives forward but also serve as an important source of revenue that sustains the Chamber's operating budget. In 2024–2025, thanks to the dedication of our committees, the Chamber successfully delivered a wide range of programs, events, and activities that strengthened member engagement and advanced our mission.

# MEMBER SERVICES

## OUTREACH

Throughout the year, the Chamber maintained strong and consistent contact with its membership through a variety of outreach efforts. Created by Alejandro Silva, our weekly Member News & Upcoming Events email provided timely updates, while the Chamber and Cola Blanca websites offered relevant information for both members and the public. The launch of our new interactive data system, Growth Zone, gave members instant access to their business accounts and resources.

Beyond digital communications, the Chamber engaged members through ribbon cuttings, networking events, and signature programs that fostered visibility and connection. Our Bienvenidos Committee extended a personal touch through welcome calls, visits, and outreach to new members. On a broader scale, the Chamber amplified its voice through press releases, social media platforms, and media interviews, ensuring that both our members and the community at large remained informed and connected to our mission.

## BIENVENIDOS & MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Under the leadership of Marifer Castillo, the Bienvenidos & Membership Committee had an outstanding year, strengthening the Chamber's role as the first point of welcome for new and existing members. In 2024–2025, the committee proudly hosted 54 ribbon cuttings, 8 groundbreaking ceremonies, 3 anniversary celebrations, and 2 welcome events – each creating meaningful visibility and connection for local businesses.



The Bienvenidos/Membership Committee had a milestone year, highlighted by the Chamber's first-ever General Membership Meeting, held on October 17, 2024, at the Falcon Bank Event Center. With over 100 attendees, the event was made possible through the generous support of VERTX as Title Sponsor and featured the debut of our Chamber Champions Documentary, a project that took a full year to film. This impressive achievement was further supported by the efforts of Natalia Garcia, Member Sales & Relations Coordinator, and Alejandro Silva, Administrative Assistant, whose strategic social media outreach expanded the Chamber's visibility and engagement across the community. Financially, the event generated \$4,000 in income and incurred \$4,209 in expenses, resulting in a modest net loss of \$209. However, strong community participation and positive feedback indicate that support for the General Membership Meeting is gathering steam for the coming fiscal year, positioning it to become a cornerstone Chamber tradition.

In addition to this milestone, the committee continued to advance key initiatives, including anniversary recognitions and the Ambassador of the Month program, which spotlighted the dedication of our volunteers. Throughout the year, the Bienvenidos Committee enhanced traditional ribbon-cutting services, introduced new event formats, and strengthened outreach to both new and long-standing members—ensuring that every milestone was celebrated and every member felt part of the Chamber family.



## HEALTH SERVICES COMMITTEE

In 2024–2025, the Health Services Committee advanced its mission through a series of impactful initiatives centered on community wellness and member engagement. The committee launched "Chamber Voices for Better Choices," a video series featuring healthcare professionals sharing practical guidance on wellness topics, and laid the foundation for the first Health Forum, set to debut in October. In partnership with community organizations, the committee also hosted a Blood Drive to benefit residents. Additionally, in collaboration with the City of Laredo, the Chamber promoted the Move Texas program, encouraging exercise, wellness, and healthy lifestyles through community activities and outreach.



# SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Under the leadership of committee chair Gilbert Bermea, the Small Business Committee had an impactful year, driven not only by its leadership but also by a dedicated group of volunteers who elevated our presence and recognition efforts. Their creativity powered the Small Business Spotlights on social media, helping us showcase and celebrate local entrepreneurs in fresh and engaging ways.



Small Business Week (May 4–10, 2025) stood out as a highlight, with a series of initiatives designed to empower and uplift the small business community. The week kicked off with a vibrant Cinco de Mayo Small Business Market at Vietnam Veterans Plaza, where Mayor Victor Treviño issued a formal proclamation on May 3, 2025, recognizing the essential role of small businesses in our community.

Throughout the week, the Chamber partnered with the City of Laredo to present *Small Business Spotlights*, hosted a PNC Women in Business webcast featuring special guest Hoda Kotb, and launched Wellness Wednesday in collaboration with local fitness centers and gyms.

Together, these efforts not only celebrated small businesses but also deepened connections, strengthened visibility, and showcased the Chamber as a champion of entrepreneurship.



# SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

## BUSINESS ICONS AWARDS



On June 5, 2025, the Small Business Committee proudly hosted the 2025 Business ICONS Awards, an evening dedicated to honoring the outstanding entrepreneurs and organizations shaping Laredo's business community. The celebration highlighted excellence across four prestigious categories:

- Professional Excellence Award – Jorge Leal, CEO, Laredo Medical Center
- Non-Profit Organization of the Year – Gateway Community Health Center, Inc.
- Small Business of the Year – FARO Companies
- Business Persons of the Year – Mike and Danielle Marasco

With more than 280 attendees, the event demonstrated remarkable community support and engagement. PNC Bank once again served as the Title Sponsor, reinforcing its commitment to recognizing excellence and supporting the Laredo business community. Financially, the ICONS Awards generated \$91,850 in gross revenue against \$48,448.10 in expenses, resulting in a net gain of approximately \$43,401.90—underscoring the event's significance as both a community celebration and a vital fundraiser for Chamber initiatives.



# GAME CHANGER AWARDS

On November 7, 2024, under the leadership of Committee Chair David Vasquez, the Laredo Chamber hosted the Game Changer Awards Ceremony at the Casa Blanca Golf Course, a non-traditional event that celebrates business leaders whose vision and innovation have made a lasting impact on Laredo's economy and quality of life.

This year's event featured interactive elements and compelling interviews with each honoree, highlighting their unique journeys and contributions.

The 2024 Game Changer Honorees were:

- Dr. Rebecca Rodriguez (Laredo Pet Vet)
- Janet Zapata (550 Pizzeria)
- The Rocha Family - Rolando, Sam, and Rey Rocha (Rocha's, Gatsby's, & Ryze)
- Jerry Maldonado (Laredo Motor Carriers Association)
- Dr. Georgette Rangel (Honey by Nurse Jett)

The honorees were announced at a recognition Meet and Greet mixer sponsored by Trauma Therapy of South Texas at Colmena Bar and Grille on October 22, 2024. Their investment, creativity, and commitment to community truly exemplify what it means to be a Game Changer.

Financially, the event generated \$21,950 in gross income against \$13,366 in expenses, resulting in a net gain of \$8,584.



# ENTERTAINMENT & HOSPITALITY COMMITTEE

Under the leadership of Jorge Quijano and Karina Rodriguez, the Entertainment & Hospitality Committee focused on delivering vibrant and engaging experiences for Chamber members throughout the year. The fiscal year kicked off with Support Your Local Chamber Day on October 16, 2024, when the committee ensured the Chamber building was filled with members and guests—highlighting its role as a hub for business engagement. Soon after, the committee brought holiday cheer with the Annual Mingle & Jingle Holiday Party on December 5, 2024, at Whiskey River Country Bar. With more than 150 guests in attendance, this free event featured entertainment, raffle prizes, delicious food, and plenty of festive spirit, strengthening the sense of community that defines the Chamber.

In the spring, the Chamber proudly joined the community in the WBCA festivities, participating in both the IBC Youth Parade Under the Stars and the Anheuser-Busch Grand Parade on February 20 and 22, 2025. Throughout the year, the committee also fostered member connections through multiple member mixers and organized three successful “Coffee with the Chairwoman” sessions, offering members meaningful opportunities to engage directly with Chairwoman of the Board, Sandra M. Alaniz.

Remarkably, even though most committee events were offered free of charge to members, the Entertainment & Hospitality Committee still managed to host and organize over 12 events while achieving a net gain of \$3,305.62. This was made possible through careful planning and sponsorship support, with total expenses of \$5,268.38 offset by \$8,574 in income.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The Mingle & Jingle Holiday Party is one of the longest-running Chamber traditions, and every year it's completely free to members—thanks to the committee's work in securing sponsors and partners.



# LAREDO WOMEN'S FORUM

Held on July 31, 2025, the Laredo Women's Forum reached new heights, bringing together more than 300 women for a sold-out event that was both powerful and deeply personal. The audience was a true reflection of our community: professionals, entrepreneurs, and leaders from across industries, united by a shared desire to support one another and grow.

The program was carefully crafted to spark honest dialogue and meaningful reflection. Each of our speakers—Kimberly Lawrence, President of Visa North America, Dr. Mery Cortes-Bergoderi of Gateway Community Health Center, attorney Martha Cigarroa, broker Sandra Alaniz, and IBC Bank Executive Vice President Dalia Martinez—shared stories of resilience, vision, and leadership. Their voices carried weight not only because of their accomplishments but because of the vulnerability and authenticity they brought to the stage. The keynote reminded all in attendance of the power of mentorship, perseverance, and collective strength.

Conversations that began on stage spilled naturally into the room, as women connected with one another on both professional and personal levels. What made the Forum remarkable was not simply the caliber of speakers or the size of the audience, but the atmosphere it created. The event felt like both a celebration and a call to action—an acknowledgment of how far women have come in Laredo and a commitment to lifting the next generation higher. Every detail, from the program design to the intentional pauses for dialogue, was shaped with care to ensure the women in the room felt valued, seen, and empowered. The event also generated a net gain of \$15,298, reinforcing its significance as both an inspiring gathering and a sustainable initiative for the Chamber. None of this would have been possible without the generous support of IBC Bank, whose partnership ensured that the Forum not only came to life but also achieved its goal of inspiring lasting impact in our community.



# COLA BLANCA BIG BUCK CONTEST COMMITTEE

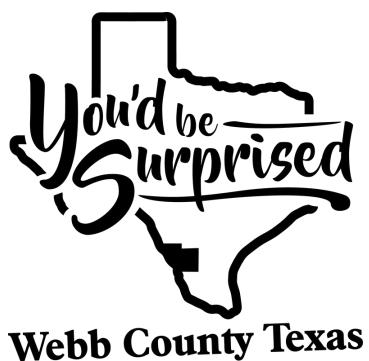
In 2024–2025, the Cola Blanca Big Buck Contest once again proved to be one of the Chamber's most celebrated traditions, drawing over 300 rifle and bow hunters from across the region throughout the fall and winter seasons. Under the leadership of Chair Emmanuel Guajardo, winners were honored across more than 43 categories, spanning men, women, youth, archery, and open divisions, at the annual Awards Pachanga held on August 23, 2025, at the 1848 Event Center.

Organized by Gwen Chandarlis and the Cola Blanca Committee, the event drew more than 400 attendees, with over half traveling from outside Webb County. With its lively exhibit area, raffle prizes, great food, and festive atmosphere, the Pachanga highlighted the contest's strong draw as both a community celebration and an economic driver. The contest is projected to gross over \$100,000 this year. Funding from the City of Laredo and Webb County's third-party contracts supplements the contest's marketing and promotional efforts.

The committee also continued its efforts to reenergize the contest by introducing new events and entertainment. On May 17, 2025, the Sporting Clays Shoot was held at the South Texas Shooting Complex. Promoted across surrounding communities and into Mexico, the event was a success with over 78 participants and multiple team entries. The addition of a shotgun raffle proved especially popular, contributing to gross revenues of more than \$13,781.38.

Notably, funding support from the City of Laredo and Webb County through third-party contracts helped supplement marketing and promotional efforts, ensuring broader reach and participation.

Through these initiatives, the Cola Blanca Committee continues to promote tourism, outdoor sports, and recreational activities, reinforcing the Chamber's mission to foster trade, commerce, and business growth while enhancing the economic vitality of Laredo and Webb County.



# BOLA BLANCA CHAMBER CLASSIC

The Bola Blanca Golf Tournament, held on April 5, 2025, at the Casa Blanca Golf Course, was like no other. With FARO Companies as the Title Sponsor and Tournament Chair Jorge Leal leading the way, more than 100 golfers came together for a memorable day on the greens.

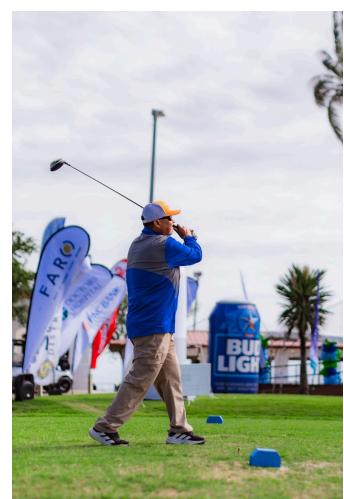
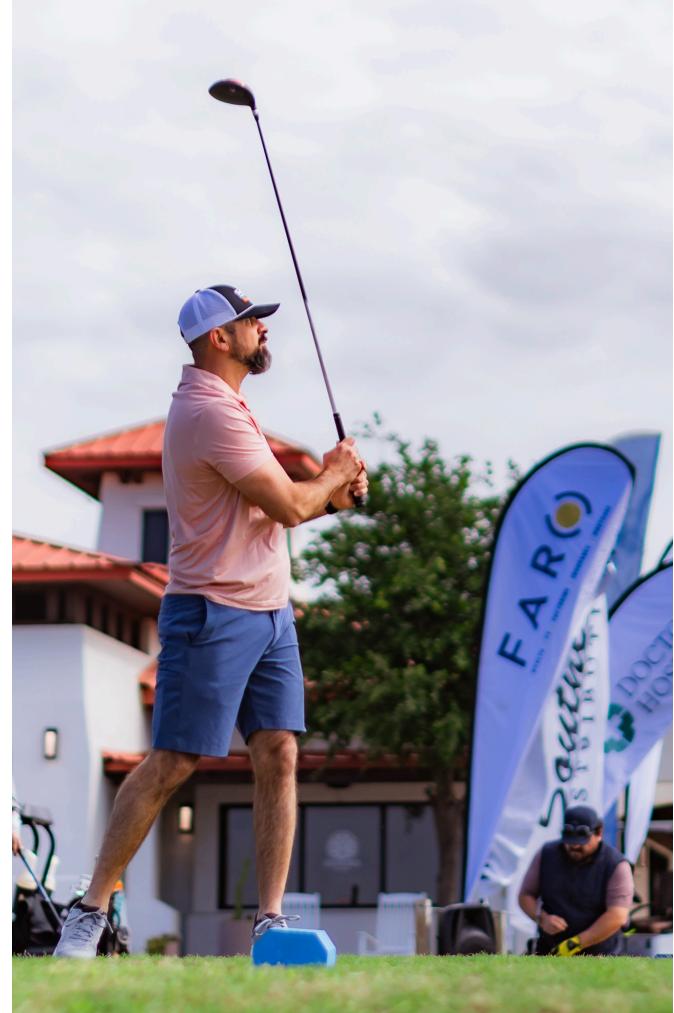
Players received a custom shoe bag as part of their welcome package, and the event featured a lively "darty" (day party) that set it apart from any other tournament in the region. Adding to the excitement, all 18 holes were proudly sponsored, ensuring full course coverage and raising additional funds in support of Chamber initiatives.

Financially, the tournament generated \$52,515.43 in gross income against \$29,597.98 in expenses, resulting in a strong net gain of \$22,917.45. Beyond the numbers, the Bola Blanca Golf Tournament has continued to solidify its reputation as one of the Chamber's premier events—delivering not only a fantastic day of golf but also showcasing the power of collaboration, sponsorship, and community spirit in driving positive impact.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The Bola Blanca Golf Tournament is in its 29<sup>th</sup> year, making it one of the Chamber's most enduring traditions. Several local businesses have proudly sponsored or played in the tournament for years, underscoring its deep community roots and lasting impact.



# GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COMMITTEE



Advocacy for the business community remains one of the Laredo Chamber's top priorities. Under the leadership of Andrew Carranco, the Governmental Affairs Committee spearheaded a range of initiatives, built key partnerships, and ensured that the collective voice of our members was heard at the local, state, and national levels. While a single business may struggle to influence policy, the Chamber unifies businesses of all sizes—giving their concerns greater weight on issues such as infrastructure, labor laws, and trade policy.



One of the year's most significant milestones was the Chamber's role in hosting a high-profile panel discussion that brought together Congressman Henry Cuellar, Senator Ted Cruz, Nuevo León Governor Samuel García, and Mayor Victor Treviño. This unprecedented collaboration highlighted the importance of binational partnerships and was instrumental in advancing dialogue around regional development and securing presidential permits for bridge expansion projects, critical to the future of cross-border trade and economic growth.

Another major highlight was the annual Legislative Trip to Washington, D.C. on March 10–12, 2025, where the Chamber joined the City of Laredo and Webb County to advocate for regional priorities. The delegation carried forth a list of legislative issues while meeting with officials and agencies of interest. The program included a private lunch with Senator John Cornyn, co-hosted with Talise, providing members a unique opportunity to connect with the senator in an informal setting. Delegates also engaged with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, gaining insights from policy experts, and visited the Canadian, German, and Mexican Embassies as well as multiple federal agencies. A private reception, sponsored by San Isidro Development, added valuable networking opportunities to the trip.



At the state level, the Chamber traveled to Austin, Texas on February 3–6, 2025, to meet with state legislators and advocate for local business interests. The Chamber also remained engaged on pressing local matters, including working closely with City officials during the boil water notice crisis in the fall, ensuring members were informed and represented in solution-focused discussions.

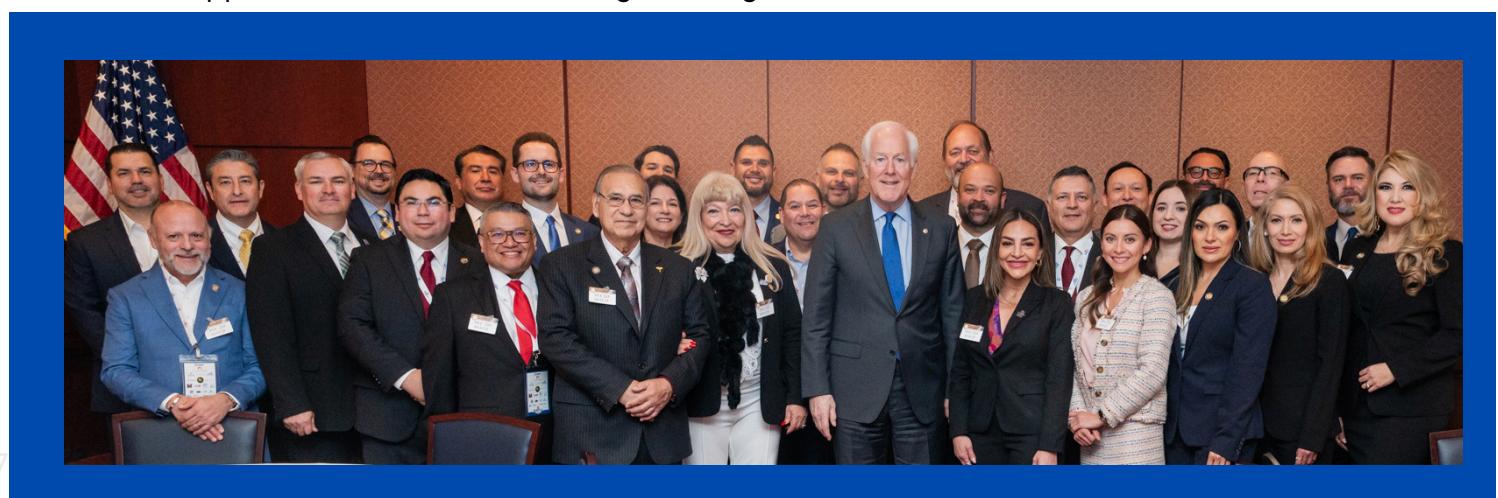
Ongoing advocacy was further strengthened through partnerships with local organizations, including the Laredo Economic Development Corporation, Laredo Licensed U.S. Customs Brokers, ALFA, and the Laredo Motor Carriers Association. These collaborations helped identify and address issues of shared concern within the business community. Additionally, the Chamber continued its signature Breakfast with the Mayor and Community Leaders series, offering members timely updates and meaningful dialogue with Mayor Victor Treviño and other community leaders.

Through these efforts, the Governmental Affairs Committee reaffirmed the Chamber's role as the leading advocate for Laredo's business community, ensuring that our members' voices are not only heard but acted upon at every level of government.



## WHY IT MATTERS

Advocacy is at the heart of what the Chamber does. We are the collective voice of Laredo's business community. While one business alone may find it difficult to influence policy, together we have the power to shape conversations and decisions at the local, state, and national levels. From infrastructure and trade to workforce and quality-of-life issues, the Chamber ensures that the concerns of our members are heard and acted upon. Supporting our advocacy efforts ensures we can continue this meaningful work for you. This year alone, we secured over \$48,000 in sponsorships, expended approximately \$40,968, and achieved a net gain of about \$7,032.00—resources that allow us to sustain and expand our advocacy on behalf of every business in our community. By standing with us, you help strengthen the Chamber's ability to protect your interests, open doors to new opportunities, and drive meaningful change that benefits all.



# EXTERNAL CONTRACTS

In 2024–2025, the Laredo Chamber once again partnered with Webb County and the City of Laredo to manage contracts funded by the Hotel/Motel Tax, which is specifically designated for marketing and promotional activities that attract visitors to the region.

- “You’d Be Surprised!” Campaign – With \$150,000 in funding from Webb County, the Chamber continued to expand this award-winning campaign targeting hunters, outdoor sports enthusiasts, bird watchers, U.S. and Mexican tourists, and corporate visitors. Originally launched in 2019, “You’d Be Surprised!” was designed to position Webb County as a destination of choice. Its ongoing success has allowed the Chamber to sustain and broaden outreach in 2024–2025 through diverse promotional strategies that increase visibility and visitor engagement.
- City Contract Supporting Cola Blanca – The Chamber also managed a \$35,000 City of Laredo Hotel/Motel Tax contract in support of the Cola Blanca Big Buck Contest. These funds supplemented contest revenue by covering partial personnel costs, media advertising, and prizes, helping strengthen one of the region’s most recognized tourism and outdoor sporting events.

Together, these initiatives highlight the Chamber’s ongoing commitment to promoting Webb County and Laredo as vibrant, attractive destinations, enhancing tourism, supporting local businesses, and showcasing the unique character of our community to visitors from near and far.





# LAREDO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION, INC.

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that serves as the educational and community development arm of the Chamber. As the hub for leadership, workforce development, and educational initiatives, the Foundation drives programs that strengthen both people and businesses—ultimately fueling long-term community and economic growth in the Laredo region.

Through its diverse portfolio of initiatives, the Foundation equips students, entrepreneurs, and professionals with the tools they need to succeed. Current programs include the Business Development Certification Program (BDCP), BDCP en Español, School Bell Awards, Spirit of Laredo Scholarship Competition, Elevate Laredo Leadership Program, and Youth Leadership Laredo. Together, these efforts cultivate a stronger, more educated workforce and help prepare the next generation of leaders for Laredo's future.



**BUILDING LEADERS.  
STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY.**



# OUR LEADERSHIP

- Adrian Zapata: Chairman, Business Executive, PAD Specialists
- Sandra Alaniz: Chair-Elect Broker/Owner, RE/MAX Real Estate Services
- Elizabeth Alonso-Villarreal: Secretary/Treasurer, CEO, 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
- Mike Marasco: Director at Large, President, McDonald's of Laredo
- 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 Vanessa Frausto and proudly presented by Falcon Bank, the Business Development Certification Committee focused on advancing innovative professional development opportunities for Chamber members. The committee successfully delivered the annual Business Development Certification Program (BDCP), a series of nine professional development seminars offered at no cost to members. Each seminar provided education on the latest business practices, strategies for exceptional customer service, and tools to foster a positive business image within the Laredo community. Thanks to the support of Falcon Bank and additional sponsors, the program generated \$3,125 in income while incurring only \$988 in expenses, resulting in a net gain of \$2,137, further ensuring the sustainability of this valuable member benefit.

The program's success was evident, with more than 10 business professionals volunteering their expertise and over 350 attendees participating throughout the series. A total of 38 individuals graduated from the program by completing more than 80% of the seminars. The graduating class reflected both gender balance and industry diversity, with 24 women and 14 men representing a wide spectrum of fields—including banking and finance (5), healthcare (5), non-profit (4), hotel industry (1), title companies (4), and self-employed entrepreneurs (6). This diversity underscores the Chamber's role in equipping professionals across industries with the skills to thrive in today's competitive environment.





# BDCP EN ESPAÑOL

In 2025, the Chamber Foundation proudly launched the Business Development Certification Program (BDCP) en Español, a six-seminar series delivered entirely in Spanish to better serve our diverse business community. Chaired by Claudia Hinojosa and made possible through the unwavering support and community investment of IBC Bank as Presenting Sponsor, the program was met with overwhelming enthusiasm. With a minimum of \$977 in expenses and \$3,000 in sponsorships, the program achieved a net gain of \$2,023, ensuring its sustainability and future growth.

Over the course of the series, more than 150 attendees participated, representing industries such as banking, restaurants, logistics, insurance, media, and more. In total, 15 businesses took part, with 34 graduates successfully completing the program and earning their certification.

The inaugural BDCP en Español was a resounding success, equipping participants with practical tools to grow and sustain their enterprises while reinforcing the Chamber's commitment to inclusivity, innovation, and advancing the success of all members of our business community.



## BREAKING BARRIERS

Launching BDCP en Español is crucial for our community because it breaks down language barriers and ensures that Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs have equal access to the tools, training, and resources needed to succeed. By meeting business owners where they are, the Chamber is fostering greater inclusion, strengthening small businesses across diverse industries, and ultimately contributing to the long-term economic vitality of Laredo and Webb County.

# ELEVATE LAREDO LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Under the leadership of Jesse Gonzalez, the Elevate Laredo program continued to provide citizens with opportunities to learn about Laredo's rich history while offering a platform that empowers and educates emerging and current leaders to engage with the opportunities and challenges facing our bicultural border region.

Since its inception, Elevate Laredo has graduated over 25 classes and more than 500 participants. Its prestigious curriculum has engaged numerous local professionals, with past rosters including elected officials, education leaders, banking professionals, and more.

In 2024–2025, the program welcomed 21 participants from diverse professional backgrounds. Sessions covered a wide range of topics, including leadership, culture, transportation and infrastructure, education and workforce development, health and human services, government, and more. The program culminated with the Class of 2025 Graduation on August 13, 2025, at the Laredo Country Club.

Financially, the program collected over \$19,100 in revenue and incurred \$19,516 in expenses, resulting in a modest net loss of \$416. However, efforts to enhance and strengthen the program are ongoing to ensure its long-term sustainability and impact.

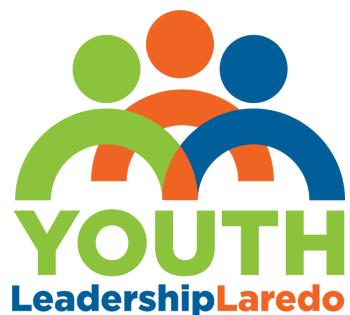
Applications are now open for the Class of 2026.



# 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. The committee and the students held the kick-off event at Texas A&M International University on September 7, 2024.

Mike Marasco, owner of McDonald's of Laredo, served as the keynote speaker and addressed all grade levels with an inspiring message on leadership, perseverance, and community impact. Under the leadership of Adrian Zapata, the Youth Leadership Laredo (YLL) program engaged 155 students during the 2024–2025 academic year, with a participant makeup of 40% male and 60% female.



The cohort included 36 students from Laredo ISD, 93 from United ISD, 3 from TAMIU Staggs Academy of International and STEM Studies, 13 from the Diocese of Laredo, 4 from United Day, 3 from Harmony Public Schools, and 3 from other institutions. Throughout the year, students participated in a wide range of enriching experiences and hands-on learning opportunities, designed to foster leadership, civic responsibility, and personal growth.

The Youth Leadership Laredo (YLL) students experienced a dynamic year filled with hands-on learning and exposure to key sectors shaping our community. They explored Laredo's history through a downtown tour, gained insights into communications and marketing during a media visit to KGNS studios, and participated in a federal mock trial at the George P. Kazen Federal Courthouse. Students also expanded their understanding of healthcare with a visit to the UT Health Science Center and hands-on Stop the Bleed training at Laredo Medical Center.



The program also provided opportunities to explore Laredo's economic and environmental landscape. Students participated in a Laredo Trade Tour at Multimodal Logistics Inc., toured the Laredo Water Museum, hiked the Las Palmas Nature Trail, and learned about local water systems. They also engaged in agriculture education with the Laredo Center for Urban & Agricultural Sustainability at the Canseco Demonstration Farm. Beyond these immersive experiences, students sharpened essential leadership and financial literacy skills through a series of targeted workshops, equipping them with the tools to grow as confident leaders and engaged citizens.

Twenty-one graduating seniors from the Class of 2025 completed the five-year program and were awarded \$600 scholarships during the end-of-year awards ceremony on May 7, 2025, at Laredo College.

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP LAREDO SMASH FOR SCHOLARS TENNIS TOURNAMENT

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce Foundation proudly hosted its first annual Smash for Scholars Tennis Tournament on June 13–15, 2025, at the George Pappas Tennis Courts. Made possible under the leadership of Adrian Zapata and in collaboration with the City of Laredo Parks and Recreation Department, the community-centered event brought together more than 120 participants from Laredo and surrounding areas, combining athletic competition with a meaningful cause. In total, the tournament raised over \$13,000 to fund scholarships for graduating seniors of the Youth Leadership Laredo (YLL) program, a five-year civic and leadership development initiative for high school students. These scholarships will empower future leaders who have demonstrated a strong commitment to civic responsibility, community engagement, and personal growth.



# EDUCATION COMMITTEE

## SCHOOL BELL AWARDS

Under the leadership of Dr. Diana Ortiz and Veronica Castillón, the committee proudly hosted the School Bell Awards on May 1, 2025, in collaboration with Laredo College, Sames Laredo Chevrolet, Killam Development, McDonald's of Laredo, Coca-Cola Arca Continental, and PNC Bank. This year, 12 exemplary educators were honored with the prestigious award, representing every level of the local education spectrum across both private and public schools.

As part of the recognition, Sames Laredo Chevrolet and Killam Development generously presented each recipient with a \$500 monetary award, while McDonald's of Laredo provided gift baskets for all honorees. The program grossed \$6,800 in revenue and incurred \$6,906.80 in expenses, resulting in a net loss of \$106.80, with additional costs offset by generous in-kind sponsorships.

The School Bell Awards not only celebrate the dedication of outstanding educators but also highlight the Chamber's commitment to strengthening partnerships between the business and education communities.



# EDUCATION COMMITTEE

## 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 48 video entries this year.

The winners were:

- Stephanie Lozano from John B. Alexander High School (1st place),
- Jesus Arroyo from LBJ High School (2nd place), and
- Brilynn Conchas from John B. Alexander High School (3rd place).

They were awarded scholarships of \$2,000, \$1,000, and \$500, respectively, courtesy of Killam Development and the Education Committee. Leonardo Moreno (4th place), Kiara Ramon-Lozano (5th place), and Edgar Lee Nunez (6th place) were also recognized and awarded scholarships of \$200.



# WHAT'S NEXT?

Looking ahead, the Laredo Chamber Foundation will continue to expand its programs and deepen its impact in the community. Building on the success of initiatives like Elevate Laredo, Youth Leadership Laredo, and the Business Development Certification Program, the Foundation is focused on creating new opportunities for leadership development, workforce training, and community engagement.

Our priority is to grow programming that supports students, entrepreneurs, and business leaders alike, ensuring that every generation has the tools to thrive. With an emphasis on measurable outcomes, stronger partnerships, and innovative approaches, the Foundation is positioning itself as a catalyst for education, leadership, and long-term economic vitality in Laredo and Webb County.



## WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce Foundation's programs are not one-time events—they are multi-session series that require thoughtful planning, consistent coordination, and strong execution. These impactful initiatives are only possible thanks to the dedication of our volunteers. If you are passionate about leadership, education, and strengthening our community, we invite you to get involved and help us continue building programs that make a lasting difference.

# BE PART OF THE 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.



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# MEET OUR TEAM

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce is powered by a small but mighty team whose dedication ensures that every program, event, and initiative is delivered with excellence. Though lean in size, our staff's commitment, creativity, and teamwork drive the Chamber's mission forward every day, proving that impact is not measured by numbers, but by passion and results.

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