World-Class Patient Care

At Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso, you’ll find over 250 specialists who are at the forefront of the latest medical research and treatment opportunities.

Our ever-growing network of physician experts means that you and your family have access to world-class patient care ... right here at home.

To learn more, or make an appointment at a clinic near you, visit ttpelpaso.com
THE VALUE OF TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

At its center, TTUHSC El Paso’s mission is to serve the community – from educating health care professionals to providing world-class patient care in our clinics. This couldn’t be done without the science behind medicine – biomedical research – which has paved the way for treatments and continually moves us forward in the understanding of disease.

Researchers at TTUHSC El Paso are part of a global network of scientists first in line to help diagnose, treat and cure debilitating diseases. In the Borderland, those conditions span from diabetes and cancer, to neurological conditions and infectious diseases – all of which are studied at the Foster School of Medicine’s four Centers of Emphasis in the Department of Molecular and Translational Medicine, as well as the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, where students explore the dynamics of various health issues under the guidance of faculty.

Our researchers focus on breakthrough discoveries, but also mentor and lead future generations of physicians and biomedical scientists. Their impactful work has resulted in numerous prevention programs, significant discoveries for treatment and ongoing collaboration in clinical trials.

Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of research, as much of the world rested their hope in scientists to develop vaccines. Researchers were problem solvers, taking on the challenge while also discovering ways to treat the severely ill. Though not always seen, they stood side-by-side with others on the front lines.

The Fall/Winter 2021 edition of TTUHSC El Paso Alumni & Friends is our homage to biomedical researchers, physician-scientists and students at TTUHSC El Paso whose work has transformed health care in a region once understudied and underserved. In this edition, you’ll learn more about their areas of focus and how they’ve touched the lives of people in the Paso del Norte region.

Researchers unite us in their passion for discovering the underpinnings of disease. In the Paso del Norte region, their studies extend beyond science and into the well-being of our entire community.

Richard Lange, M.D., M.B.A.
Rick and Ginger Francis Endowed President

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

The Office of Institutional Advancement values your feedback on TTUHSC El Paso Alumni & Friends.
Scan the QR code to take a quick three-minute survey about our magazine.

SCAN ME!
Inside TTUHSC El Paso Alumni & Friends

In Each Issue

20  Highlight
26  Serving the Community
30  Philanthropy in Review
32  Filling the Gap
46  Focus on Success
52  Alumni Profiles

Features

4  On the Front Line of Research
TTUHSC El Paso links science and patient care through innovative studies, prevention programs and life-changing treatment

16  Mental Health in the Borderland
An increase in mental health disorders drives research and clinical advancement at TTUHSC El Paso

22  EP-HEAT: Keeping the Community Connected
Education and access are the focus of a new TTUHSC El Paso public health initiative

28  Two Countries, One Community
Nursing students help vaccinate more than 4,000 Mexican workers

On the Cover
Research is a key component in TTUHSC El Paso’s mission to improve lives in the Borderland and transform biomedical science internationally. Every element, from biostatistics and collaborative research to studies on underserved populations, provides a foundation for world-class patient care in our region.

Facebook  Twitter  Instagram  @TTUHSCEP
ON THE FRONT LINE OF RESEARCH

TTUHSC El Paso links science and patient care

By Danielle Urbina

As a health sciences center, TTUHSC El Paso plays a pivotal role in transforming health care for a region historically underserved. Research is key to the university’s mission of understanding the intricacies of diseases that impact our predominantly Hispanic population on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Research at our university is done primarily in the Department of Molecular and Translational Medicine’s four Centers of Emphasis at the Foster School of Medicine. There, faculty researchers and students they mentor are pursuing discoveries for treating diseases prevalent in the Borderland, including diabetes and cancer. While their work impacts the nation as a whole, its focus on Hispanic populations will lead to better, healthier lives for all Borderland residents.

This issue of TTUHSC El Paso Alumni & Friends offers an expansive overview of research by TTUHSC El Paso faculty and students. From prevention programs to clinical trials and collaborative research, they’re the foundation of our mission to build a healthier future for El Paso and West Texas.
As the new Vice President for Research at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso, I’m passionate about our campus and the El Paso community, and what we can do to help the people in our region live longer and healthier lives. To do this, my priority is to lead our excellent team of researchers by learning more about the diseases and health conditions that impact the Borderland, and by helping our physicians, nurses, dentists and future health care professionals provide the world-class patient care our university is known for.

Like the philosophy of this wonderful border community, I know we are stronger together. As we look toward the future, my goal is to foster research that encourages interdisciplinary collaboration and creativity so we can become a department that serves the needs of our entire university. By enhancing our research activity through this and other important endeavors, we will enrich patient care and provide state-of-the-art treatment for years to come. ☀

Deborah Clegg, Ph.D., is Vice President for Research at TTUHSC El Paso and a professor in the Department of Internal Medicine at the Foster School of Medicine.
SHAPING the FUTURE

Research is one of the cornerstones of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso.

Each master-level student is paired with a faculty member to conduct research, said Rajkumar Lakshmanawamy, Ph.D., dean of the graduate school. The school also offers a post-baccalaureate certificate program, which provides future graduate students the coursework and experience needed for admission to the GSBS and other schools.

Graduate students’ two years of study provide foundational coursework, followed by laboratory experience that coincides with TTUHSC El Paso’s Centers of Emphasis in cancer, diabetes and metabolism, infectious diseases and neuroscience.

Some student research projects are presented during the university’s Annual Research Symposium, held in the spring. The symposium offers the opportunity to highlight multidisciplinary and multi-institutional research on everything from cancer to the effectiveness of health education in West Texas.

Students at the GSBS also participate in interprofessional teamwork, preparing them for futures in health care. The goal, Dr. Lakshmanawamy said, is to educate students ready to enter the workforce with a vast array of knowledge.
The Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences gets students one step closer to advanced careers in health care

“The GSBS is the only school of higher education in El Paso to offer a collaborative environment for students to learn alongside future physicians, dentists and nurses. This provides a framework that continues after graduation, making our students exceptional health care professionals, educators and researchers,” he said.

A majority of research done in the Centers of Emphasis focuses on conditions directly impacting Latinos and border populations. Currently, 67% of GSBS students are native El Pasoans, shining a light on the school’s importance in our region. Many will go on to pursue careers in medicine or other areas of health care, often in the Borderland.

When it comes to experience, conducting innovative research and having it published advances the careers of GSBS students no matter what path they choose after graduating.

“It means something if they have their name on research that’s been published,” Dr. Lakshmanaswamy said. “These accomplishments are huge in terms of getting accepted to medical school or a Ph.D. program.”

As part of the university’s four-year strategic plan, the GSBS plans to increase the number of students admitted and enrolled in its masters, post-baccalaureate and Summer Accelerated Biomedical Research internship pipeline programs. By expanding its class sizes, the GSBS will educate even more talented biomedical researchers, enhancing studies on prevalent diseases in the Borderland and responding to TTUHSC El Paso’s core mission.”
ALWAYS SEARCHING
TTUHSC El Paso researchers seek effective treatments for breast cancer
By Aaron Bracamontes

Every day, doctors and researchers at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso work on the seemingly impossible – treating and curing breast cancer.

While some research is focused on prevention and outreach, several projects are dedicated to seeking a cure.

Potential for new treatment
Messenger RNAs – responsible for carrying the instructions for making proteins in the body – have become a household topic due to COVID-19 vaccines. However, in recent years, novel long noncoding RNAs have shown therapeutic potential, which has opened up enormous possibilities of treating diseases with precision. Because of those possibilities, novel long noncoding RNAs have been the focus of breast cancer research at TTUHSC El Paso for a while.

Long noncoding RNAs do not deal with antigens like the ones used in vaccines. Instead, they control various cellular processes in the body, helping it function for everyday survival. In the case of breast cancer, estrogen may increase or decrease the number of long noncoding RNAs in the body.

Shrikanth Gadad, Ph.D., M.Sc., assistant professor in the Center of Emphasis in Cancer, is researching to determine if long noncoding RNAs could be the target used to diagnose or treat estrogen-responsive cancers, such as colorectal and breast cancer. Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among women, and in El Paso there were 106 cases for every 100,000 women from 2013 to 2017, according to Healthy Paso Del Norte.
Additionally, from 2014-2018, 100 in 100,000 Hispanic women were diagnosed with breast cancer, according to the National Cancer Institute.

Those statistics give urgency to research being conducted at TTUHSC El Paso. Dr. Gadad said research has found long noncoding RNAs present abnormally, often signaling signs of cancer or tumor.

“Long noncoding RNAs can be clinically used to diagnose and treat breast cancers with precision,” Dr. Gadad said. “If successful, this research could be a major breakthrough and help advance the field toward treatments geared for a specific population or individual. That could bring hope to patients who didn’t have any before.”

**Hope for Hispanic populations**
Researchers are also looking for new targets associated with triple-negative breast cancers, which are aggressive and prevalent in Hispanics.

Currently, breast cancer cells are tested to try to detect the presence of three types of protein groups known as estrogen receptor, progesterone receptor or human epidermal growth factor receptor 2. If the tests are negative for all three groups, the breast cancer is considered triple-negative. That means there is no target for treatment, which leaves chemotherapy and radiation as the only options.

While effective, both cancer treatments can take a heavy toll on patients. Chemotherapy kills fast-growing cancer cells, but can also affect normal healthy cells in the heart, kidneys, lungs and nervous system. Meanwhile, radiation therapy can result in fatigue and skin problems, such as blisters or peeling. Both treatments are also known to cause hair loss.

If research led by Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Dean Rajkumar Lakshmanaswamy, Ph.D., is successful in finding characteristics unique to triple-negative cancers, it would provide researchers a target to treat and hopefully find precise medication.

Dr. Lakshmanaswamy’s research is at different stages of development, and without a specific target there can be no progress on potential drugs or treatments. However, he said if his research is successful, it could clear a path toward a life-saving treatment for triple-negative breast cancer patients.

“Based on our findings, we think that Hispanics have a higher frequency of being diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer,” Dr. Lakshmanaswamy said. “Successful discoveries based on potential treatment would give many members of our community a fighting chance against this aggressive cancer. That could make a significant difference to many El Pasoans and other members of Hispanic communities.”

“Successful discoveries based on potential treatment would give many members of our community a fighting chance against this aggressive cancer.”

- Rajkumar Lakshmanaswamy, Ph.D.
TTUHSC El Paso researchers have joined the worldwide effort to end the pandemic while mitigating the virus’s impact on vulnerable groups of people. On these pages, we highlight COVID-19 research at our university.

By David Peregino

COVID-19’S TOLL ON HISPANICS
To uncover why Hispanics are at risk for hospitalization and death from COVID-19, Assistant Professor of Microbiology Jorge Cervantes, M.D., Ph.D., and Chief of Infectious Diseases Armando Meza, M.D., led a team that examined chronic health conditions in 82 Hispanic patients with an average age of 55 who fell ill with COVID-19.

They found that nearly half the group had hypertension, and more than a third had diabetes.

2/3

Ultimately two-thirds were hospitalized, and nearly 20% died.

The researchers say it’s critical to identify risk factors to help guide the best health care interventions for Hispanics in the U.S.-Mexico border region. The results of the study were published in the Journal of Investigative Medicine.
FACULTY CONTINUING EDUCATION PIVOTS TO eLEARNING

A paper published in the Journal of Perinatal Medicine documents the Office of Faculty Development’s efforts to transition TTUHSC El Paso’s professional development programs to eLearning in response to the pandemic. A closed campus and restricted operations designed to reduce virus transmission required a rapid shift from face-to-face continuing medical and nursing education to online instruction. The office and its collaborators developed eLearning content for the Institutional Faculty Development Program, made available via the Canvas learning management system. The approach included a blend of real-time online instruction, on-demand online instruction, and safe in-person clinical and simulation education.

COVID-19 AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

Assistant Professor E. Lee Rosenthal, Ph.D., M.S., M.P.H., director of the Society, Community, and the Individual course, is co-leading research with universities and community-based organizations nationwide in the wake of COVID-19. Dr. Rosenthal and a group of primary-care scholars wrote about community-centered population health and the pivotal role community health workers have played during the pandemic. Dr. Rosenthal and her colleagues surveyed community health workers across the Southwest to determine the impact of COVID-19 on their scope of practice, training needs and communities. In another publication, Dr. Rosenthal and others documented the Dine (Navajo) people’s strengths in fighting the “Merciless Monster of COVID-19.” The article identifies challenges tribal community health workers faced while delivering COVID-19 education, contact tracing and care coordination across a tri-state region.

PREGNANT WOMEN AT HIGHER RISK

Because women may be more susceptible to viral infections due to physiological and immunological changes during pregnancy, Pallavi Dubey, Ph.D., a researcher with the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, took a close look at birth outcomes of pregnant women infected by COVID-19. Dr. Dubey and her team conducted a review of studies of women with COVID-19 who were pregnant upon hospital admission. Their meta-analysis revealed that COVID-19 patients who are infected early in their pregnancies, experienced severe symptoms and required oxygen support are at risk for premature birth and other adverse pregnancy outcomes. The study was published in the European Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology and Reproductive Biology.
Research meets social media in a TTUHSC El Paso cancer prevention program

By Aaron Bracamontes  
Photography by Warren Love

Making the switch from meetups and classes to Facebook Lives and hashtags was necessitated by an unprecedented pandemic, but the impact has been positive for the Pasos Para Prevenir Cancer program at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso.

The program was established in 2018, after Jennifer Salinas, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Molecular and Translational Medicine, received a $1.2 million grant from the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT). Dr. Salinas is a health disparities researcher who focuses on the social practices and conditions linked to chronic disease in Hispanics.

Pasos Para Prevenir Cancer works to reduce the amount of obesity-related cancers in the area by providing diet tips and encouraging healthy life choices, said Dr. Salinas.

“Obesity is fuel to the existing fire that is cancer,” Dr. Salinas said. “It’s the leading risk factor in our community that we’re capable of addressing by changing dietary practices and improving physical activity.”

Over the past year, the community-based education and outreach program’s revamped social media approach has reached more of the community to prevent obesity-related cancers through increased physical activity and improved nutrition.

Pasos Para Prevenir’s Instagram, Twitter and Facebook pages are filled with healthy meal preparation demonstrations, infographics and advice on nutrition and exercise. The effort is led by Dr. Salinas’ “social media health influencers,” public educator Sandra Cobos and multimedia specialist Jesus Quezada.

“Our Facebook page used to educate in an old-fashioned way, with fliers or long videos,” Cobos said. “Now our material is quicker to digest. We cater to our audience with graphics and shorter videos packed with information they can use.”

As in-person classes and events resume around El Paso, Pasos Para Prevenir is keeping its social media game strong.

“Obesity-related cancer is a major health problem in El Paso County, where more than 70% of people are considered overweight or obese — a troubling percentage that shows no sign of decreasing."

- Jennifer Salinas, Ph.D.
During a back-to-school-themed cooking demo, Cobos spoke to both the live audience and the virtual one as Quezada recorded. The video was posted on the program’s Facebook page for anyone who wants to recreate the dish at home, while being able to pause and rewind when needed.

Community participation is vital to research conducted by Pasos Para Prevenir. The program surveys participants and tracks their quality and quantity of exercise and nutritious foods.

Claudia Peña, an audience member at the demo, said she heard about the demonstrations on the program’s Facebook page, which she started following this past summer. While Peña was eager to attend in person, she’s glad to see the demonstration is available online.

“It’s great to have these events on Facebook during the pandemic because a lot of people are afraid to come in person. It helps them to be healthy on their own time,” said Peña, 49.

Dr. Salinas aims to reach every household in El Paso, in some way, and create a healthy culture that isn’t reliant on money.

“Simple changes can have a big impact on your life and risk of cancer,” Dr. Salinas said. “That’s where our walking challenges and social media presence have been our most effective tools.”

“We cater to our audience with graphics and shorter videos packed with information they can use.”

CHECK OUT THE PASOS PARA PREVENIR FACEBOOK PAGE FOR HEALTHY LIFESTYLE TIPS AND EVENT INFORMATION!

EXCESS BODYWEIGHT IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF 13 DIFFERENT CANCERS, INCLUDING:
MORE THAN GUT INSTINCT

A breakthrough GI surgical procedure leads to a better life

By Aaron Bracamontes
Photography by Christ Chavez

In 2018, Saul Coronado felt like he was at war with his stomach. Sometimes he would eat something and end up vomiting all day.

“I went to the emergency room four times in one year,” Coronado said. “Most other times I would just rough it out and stay home, miserable.”

Coronado is one of about 30,000 in the El Paso area affected by gastroparesis, commonly known as stomach paralysis, a condition that prevents the stomach from properly emptying.

It took a breakthrough surgery, part of a four-year trial by researchers at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso and performed by Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso, to turn Coronado’s life around.

In the trial, combining stomach surgery with gastric electrical stimulation significantly improved the condition of patients with
“We can save the amount of time patients spend in a hospital and ensure a better future for them,” said Irene Sarosiek, M.D., professor and director of neurostimulation research. “Symptoms were alleviated, their quality of life improved, health care costs were lowered and hope was restored to the patients. This kind of outcome is priceless.”

The first of the combined procedures is pyloroplasty – the surgical widening of the lower part of the stomach so its contents can empty into the small intestine. The second procedure involves placing next to the stomach a device called a gastric neurostimulator, which sends electrical pulses into the wall of the stomach. The process creates a signal to the brain that reduces the frequency of nausea and vomiting.

“I was shocked when they told me they would be putting a device inside me,” Coronado said. “I was skeptical, but I went for it because I wasn’t getting any better.”

The trial was led by Dr. Sarosiek and Richard McCallum, M.D., professor and director of the TTUHSC El Paso Center for Neurogastroenterology and GI Motility. The procedures were done by TTP El Paso surgeon Brian R. Davis, M.D., FACS, FASGE, who is also a Department of Surgery professor and residency program director at TTUHSC El Paso.

“Now I feel 90% better. Those doctors are a blessing; I was in bad shape and wasn’t enjoying being sick,” Coronado said. “Thank God for those doctors, for the treatment and for TTUHSC El Paso. I had nowhere else to go.”

—Saul Coronado

Dr. McCallum said other institutes are doing similar practices. However, thanks to the TTUHSC El Paso study, he believes within five years, the combined procedure will become the “gold standard” for treating severe gastroparesis with surgery.

Richard McCallum, M.D.,
Brian R. Davis, M.D., FACS, FASGE,
Irene Sarosiek, M.D.
MENTAL HEALTH IN THE BORDERLAND

AN INCREASE IN MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS DRIVES RESEARCH AND CLINICAL ADVANCEMENT AT TTUHSC EL PASO

Opening a new clinic will increase access to care in our region.

Fabrizzio Delgado, M.D.
Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry

By Leonard Martinez
Photography by Christ Chavez

Adults have been experiencing an increase in mental illness and mental health issues over the past few years, exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic nationwide and within the region our health sciences center calls home.

In 2019, 21% of U.S. adults experienced mental illness, an increase from previous years’ data, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Only 45% of those with mental illness received treatment that same year.

“Mental health has been affected significantly throughout the country, but even more acutely in the Borderland,” said Fabrizzio Delgado, M.D., assistant professor at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso’s Department of Psychiatry. “We recently commemorated the tragic events of Aug. 3 in our community, piled on to the pandemic year we just experienced.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly added to the rise in mental health issues because of its social, economic and psychological effects, Dr. Delgado said.

“Suddenly we had to isolate. We couldn’t see our friends or family members, and these measures have greatly impacted our community’s mental health,” he said.
In El Paso, more people have experienced depression, anxiety and substance use disorders. Bipolar disorders have also been a concern for local psychiatrists as many patients stopped psychiatric visits during the pandemic. Instability in life can cause bipolar episodes in patients working toward routine treatment.

According to Dr. Delgado, an unfortunate co-occurrence of mental health disorders is substance use.

“Alcohol use has gone up all over the country, including in our region. We’re seeing increasing numbers of patients with disorders associated with alcohol and drug use. This is a very concerning trend all over Texas,” he said. In El Paso County in particular, 271 deaths related to drug overdose were reported from 2017-2019.

Along with his clinical work at Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso, Dr. Delgado is researching and identifying barriers in access to mental health care for El Pasaons. His work will help improve services and treatment strategies for people with opioid use disorders.

Growing our resources

In July, the Department of Psychiatry at TTP El Paso opened a new addiction clinic to help address mental health and substance use disorders in the Paso del Norte region. Currently, only two physicians in El Paso are board certified in addiction psychiatry, one being Dr. Delgado.

“More than 20 million Americans suffer from a type of substance use disorder,” Dr. Delgado said. “This is a very common health issue, and we don’t have enough physicians trained in the specialty of addiction psychiatry. Opening a new clinic will increase access to care in our region.”

The only of its kind in the county, the clinic is unique in its ability to provide addiction treatment specifically from addiction psychiatrists certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. Psychiatrists there can see up to 12 patients a week, but that number can be expanded as needed.

“Like other chronic illness including hypertension or diabetes, addictions must be managed in a medical model,” Dr. Delgado said. “This entails medication and medication-assisted treatment that can only be provided by physicians – ideally physicians who specialize in addiction medicine – along with counseling and groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous or SMART Recovery.”

The clinic currently serves patients 18 and older – from throughout West Texas, El Paso County and Doña Ana County – experiencing issues with substance abuse, gambling or sexual addiction. Its approach to treatment complements the Department of Psychiatry’s current myriad of psychiatric services.

El Paso and the surrounding area are considered underserved when it comes to health care providers and services, including psychiatrists and other mental health care professionals. Providing targeted mental health care and creating more ways to respond to crises is a powerful step in the university’s mission to provide access to all health care resources in the Borderland. •••
It’s cutting-edge research. With our access, TTUHSC El Paso researchers can review how the genetic signatures of brain cells drive the development of disease.

Bharathi S. Gadad, Ph.D., M.S.
Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Co-Director of the SWBB
Compared to other international brain banks, the SWBB is relatively small with just over 300 brains, but is considered special because researchers study mental illnesses, specifically mood disorders. It also stores and studies a significant number of brains from people of Hispanic descent, who historically have not been part of biological research efforts. Genetics play a role in the symptoms of mood disorders, so it’s important that the Hispanic population be represented in research.

“It’s cutting-edge research,” said Bharathi S. Gadan, Ph.D., M.S., assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry and co-director of the SWBB. “With our access, TTUHSC El Paso researchers can review how the genetic signatures of brain cells drive the development of disease. Our future goal is to use brain sections, then employ 3D reconstruction to better understand the brain’s anatomical and structural changes for a particular condition.”

The SWBB strives for innovative research that may lead to major scientific breakthroughs regarding mental illness in the Borderland, including suicidality, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, alcohol and substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder. A better understanding of the brain will lead to better diagnosis and treatments.

One advocate for the SWBB, the Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation, has supported its research since 2015, most recently awarding a $15,000 grant in 2021 to assist with the processing of new brain tissue.

“We’re pleased to help with the funding of the brain bank and private research,” said Helen Lund Yancey, president of the Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation. “It’s so important to support anything that can help those affected by any form of mental illness. Unfortunately, far too many people struggle with mental illness and do not have access to suitable health care.”

The collection and storage of brains at the SWBB allows researchers to find missing pieces to their puzzle, shaping a future for the Paso del Norte region where mental health care is widely accessible and better understood.”
“When I was at Silva, Mom would point at the Foster School of Medicine and say, ‘If you work really hard, before you know it, you’ll be going there.’”

GROWING OUR OWN
Through community support and scholarships, Borderland students are on their way to successful careers

By Danielle Urbina
Photography by Tommie Morales

As a high school student, Diana Moreno’s destiny was always within reach. A 2017 graduate of Maxine Silva Health Magnet High School, Moreno’s future was just across the street at the Foster School of Medicine, where she began her first year of medical school in July. Moreno’s mother, a nurse and Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso alum, would often point to the TTUHSC El Paso campus and tell her daughter she could someday attend the school with hard work and determination.

Like many of our students, Moreno’s Sun City roots inspired her decision to attend a TTUHSC El Paso school – a choice that wouldn’t have been possible without the philanthropic support of the community, which established the Foster School of Medicine and continues giving local students life-changing opportunities through scholarships.

As a surprise this summer, Moreno received a student scholarship from community philanthropists Kirk and Judy Robison, longtime supporters of TTUHSC El Paso. Together with the community, we’re transforming the Borderland by creating educational opportunities and inspiring future generations of health care heroes. •••
Judy and Kirk Robison

Pay to the order of Diana Moreno

Five thousand $5,000

For Student Scholarship

Judy and Kirk Robison

Dollars

05/11/2021

Foster School of Medicine

Five thousand 00/100

Judy Moreno, first-year Foster School of Medicine student, and her parents during a surprise scholarship announcement from Kirk and Judy Robison.
EP-HEAT: KEEPING THE COMMUNITY CONNECTED
Education and access are the focus of a new TTUHSC El Paso public health initiative

By Katherine Vandertulip | Photography by Tommie Morelos

Soon after returning to El Paso from Houston to join Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso as an assistant professor of immunology and microbiology, Jessica Chacon, Ph.D., was thrust into the public health chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a passionate educator and public health advocate, she embraced her new role by creating the El Paso Health Education and Awareness Team (EP-HEAT) at TTUHSC El Paso. The public health initiative brings together faculty and students from all schools to provide education for the community. The team presents virtual and in-person health fairs for residents in the Paso del Norte region, with a particular focus on neighborhoods in the 79905 ZIP code.

“79905 is home to our campus, and we should be a lead resource in partnering alongside our community to improve the lives of those in our local neighborhoods,” said Dr. Chacon.
EP-HEAT also works with promotores in the university’s Promotores de Salud community health worker program to address vaccine hesitancy and provide COVID-19 educational resources to families. Their combined efforts have garnered over $200,000 in corporate and foundation support in 2021 from Microsoft, Albertsons and the Meadows Foundation.

Summer 2021 proved busy for the EP-HEAT team. June saw the launch of Microsoft-sponsored computer literacy training and upskilling pathways aimed at connecting 79905 residents with online health resources and employability opportunities, and closing the digital divide.

In July, Hunt School of Nursing students helped El Paso County Emergency Services and constables administer 4,200 COVID-19 vaccines to maquiladora workers. Then by the end of August, EP-HEAT had distributed $10,000 worth of Albertsons grocery gift cards to local families in need.

Throughout this time, EP-HEAT has encouraged the community to be vaccinated for COVID-19 – an undertaking many students valued in their journey to becoming future health care heroes.

J.J. Childress, community engagement manager at Microsoft, and the EP-HEAT team at the 79905 Block Party in May.
“I love the field work,” said Kei Takigawa, a third-year Foster School of Medicine student and EP-HEAT team member. “I love attending educational events across the city and encouraging the community to take strides toward improving their personal health. I don’t assume the entire community has the same information as our team, so I try to connect with others, respect their beliefs and understand that people value different ideas. When promoting COVID-19 vaccines, I explain that new variants are ‘keys’ that COVID-19 can use to enter our bodies. A vaccine is a ‘strong, powerful lock’ that makes it difficult for COVID-19 to break in.”

EP-HEAT’s work will continue in the fall with ongoing health education fairs and computer literacy tutoring. They’ve presented bilingual COVID-19 health education fairs to almost 1,500 members of the El Paso community, with goals of creating bilingual COVID-19 care packages for El Pasoans who lack access to internet and computers. The team has also impacted others with their leadership by offering virtual health fairs to universities across the U.S., including the University of Pennsylvania last October.

For Dr. Chacon, working with locals and like-minded organizations is key to a healthier future for El Paso.

“Our partnerships are keeping families healthy and armed with resources to improve their quality of life.”

Jessica Chacon, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, TTUHSC El Paso
Immunology and Microbiology
BUILT ON SERVICE
THE TTUHSC EL PASO COMMUNITY GIVES BACK IN 2021

Medical Student Run Clinic Mammography Drive
In February, the Foster School of Medicine’s Medical Student Run Clinic provided free breast exams and mammograms to women in the Sparks community. Students and faculty work together with Desert Imaging’s state-of-the-art Mammos on the Move mobile mammography bus to offer women in rural communities easy access to mammograms.

Walk It Like I Talk It Community Health Fair
TTUHSC El Paso’s student organization, Tech Supports, hosted the Walk It Like I Talk It Community Health Fair in April. Held on campus, the fair promoted healthy habits, offered screenings and featured community vendors. The event was attended by El Pasans of all ages, who enjoyed outdoor festivities and participated in wellness activities.

Foster School of Medicine Summer Medical Camp
The Foster School of Medicine hosted two one-week summer medical camps for high school students on the TTUHSC El Paso campus. The camp was free for students, thanks in large part to El Paso Electric. Hosted annually by the Office of Admissions, the camp provides career exploration in the medical field and ignites interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). For more, visit eptechview.com.

TTUHSC El Paso Volunteer Days
Over 100 members of the TTUHSC El Paso family volunteered during the university’s Inaugural Days of Service, March 29 - April 1. Volunteers gave their time and talent to 15 community organizations, including Habitat for Humanity, El Pasans Fighting Hunger Food Bank, Big Brothers Big Sisters of El Paso and the Animal Rescue League, among others.
City-Wide COVID-19 Vaccine Clinics

This year, TTUHSC El Paso and TTP El Paso hosted various vaccination clinics on campus and throughout the community to assist with city-wide vaccination efforts. In the summer, RotaCare El Paso — a free clinic run by Foster School of Medicine students, the Rotary Club of El Paso and volunteer physicians — held a vaccination clinic for residents with little access to quality medical care.

In the fall, vaccination efforts continued with clinics hosted in collaboration with Horizon Middle School, Clint High School, Mountain View High School, Torrillo High School, Andress High School and Franklin High School. TTP El Paso also administered vaccines during Vax Night with the Knights, a clinic held with State Rep. Art Fierro and the Ysleta Independent School District.

Inaugural Summer Nursing Camp

The Hunt School of Nursing and Desert Mountain Area Health Education Center (AHEC) hosted a Summer Nursing Camp for Mountain View High School students interested in the nursing profession.

This is TTUHSC El Paso’s first nursing camp, and is supported by the U.S. Department of Education’s Puentes Hacia El Exito grant. The grant aims to increase the number of Hispanic nursing graduates to address the shortage of nurses on the U.S.-Mexico border. Participating students met with recruiters, tuned in to a nursing panel and attended a simulation session using virtual reality equipment.
TWO COUNTRIES, ONE COMMUNITY

NURSING STUDENTS HELP VACCINATE MORE THAN 4,000 MEXICAN WORKERS

By Aaron Bracamontes
Photography by Tommie Morelos

Dozens of Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso students journeyed to the Tornillo Port of Entry in July to join the county’s effort to vaccinate both sides of the border.

“I hope each vaccine is one step closer to us getting back to normal,” said third-semester nursing student Abigail Balbuena. “Vaccinating our neighbors in Juárez helps everyone in El Paso because of how we’re intertwined. We’re one community with a lot of love on both sides.”

On July 15, Hunt School of Nursing students helped El Paso County Emergency Services and constables administer 4,200 COVID-19 vaccines to maquiladora workers from Ciudad Juárez. On average, they vaccinated about 150 workers within minutes.

Community service – most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic – prepares Hunt School of Nursing students to work in border communities and provide patient care in the more than 100 West Texas counties served by TTUHSC El Paso.

“This is where we take what we learn in the classroom and in simulations and apply it to patient care,” said Rhonda Sparr, D.N.P., R.N., clinical professor at the Hunt School of Nursing. “Perhaps the most important lesson taught is the moral obligation to help the community, and that includes both sides of the border.”

Also volunteering were individuals from the Foster School of Medicine and TTUHSC El Paso’s El Paso Health Education Awareness Team (EP-HEAT), led by Jessica Chacon, Ph.D., an assistant professor of immunology and microbiology.

Victor Lopez, a third-semester student, said part of the reason he chose the Hunt School of Nursing was for opportunities to help the community. That type of volunteerism is synonymous with TTUHSC El Paso and its mission to improve health care in an underserved region.
“We want to remind our neighbors in Juárez how much we care about them – that’s why we’re here today,” Lopez said.

Third-semester nursing student Juliane Herrera said she was happy to travel to Tornillo, a small border town east of El Paso city limits, to make a difference. “I think it’s amazing to help our neighbors in Mexico, not only because they’re over there working through the pandemic, but also because it’ll encourage others to get vaccinated and have a positive impact on both sides of the border,” Herrera said.

The US/Mexico/Canada Strategic Alliance helped organize workers on the Mexican side of the border. Cecilia Ochoa Levine, the organization’s president, said it was exciting to see El Paso’s future health care heroes in action. “We saw the students come into the trenches with us. The buses come in quickly, but they’re vaccinating the workers without any problems,” Levine said. “It’s amazing to see them at work.”
HELPING HANDS

TTUHSC El Paso supporters aid cancer research, neurological care and combat food insecurity

Every year, a network of community support gives faculty and students added opportunities to transform health care in the Borderland. Together with their generosity, TTUHSC El Paso is building a better future for the region, while inspiring future generations of health care heroes.

JIM AND JULIE CARDWELL

Community philanthropists Jim and Julie Cardwell gifted the Department of Neurology $100,000 to upgrade the Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso Epilepsy Center. The gift – announced March 26 on Epilepsy Awareness Day – supports the department’s efforts to become an accredited Level 3 epilepsy center. Currently, El Paso has only one. The department’s ultimate goal is to become an accredited Level 4 center, which would provide the ability to treat patients suffering from persistent seizures. The achievement would make it the first Level 4 center in El Paso, the closest currently being more than 500 miles away in San Antonio. The Cardwell’s gift will also assist with the department’s recruiting efforts, helping address the shortage of neurologists in the Paso del Norte region.

FIRSTLIGHT FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

During National Financial Literacy Month in April, FirstLight Federal Credit Union gifted $80,000 in support of several TTUHSC El Paso programs. $50,000 will go toward annual scholarships for five years in all four schools; $25,000 is earmarked for the Medventure For Your Future STEM conference for middle-schoolers; and $5,000 supports the RaiderAid Food Pantry, a free campus-based pantry for students.
ALBERTSONS

To support TTUHSC El Paso’s efforts to combat food insecurity, Albertsons donated $20,000 to assist the community. The grant provided Albertsons grocery store gift cards to participants and patients of the Medical Student Run Clinic, Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso Breast Care Center and the Promotores de Salud program. Thanks to Albertsons, hundreds of El Paso families facing economic hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic have received healthy food, and cancer patients don’t have to choose between treatment or a healthy meal.

COLDWELL FOUNDATION

The Lizanell and Colbert Coldwell Foundation awarded research grants totaling $66,000 to TTUHSC El Paso faculty. Shrikanth Gadad, Ph.D., studies treatment for triple-negative breast cancer, an aggressive cancer that doesn’t respond to commonly used therapy. Ramadevi Subramani Reddy, Ph.D., is researching the effect of gedunin—a compound from the Azadirachta indica tree—against pancreatic cancer. Support from the Coldwell Foundation is helping both researchers continue their innovative work in the TTUHSC El Paso Center of Emphasis in Cancer.

DR. DAVID D. NGUYEN

David D. Nguyen, M.D., a TTUHSC alumnus and interventional pain management specialist in Houston, committed a generous gift of $43,000 to support aspiring medical students. A study room in the campus’ newest building, MSB II, was named in his honor. Dr. Nguyen completed clinical rotations in El Paso, and after returning to visit campus 18 years later, he was inspired to “pay it forward” to current students.
SOMETHING TO SMILE ABOUT

A New Era

Hunt School of Dental Medicine students begin their journey at TTUHSC El Paso

By Aaron Bracamontes
Photography by Tommie Morelos and Warren Love

Excitement is in the air following the historic opening of the Hunt School of Dental Medicine. Over the summer, the first 40 dental students arrived at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso to begin making their mark on the community.

Housed in the new Medical Sciences Building II, the dental school is the first to open in Texas in more than 50 years and the first on the U.S.-Mexico border. Students began training in the Dental Learning Center, which features high-tech simulation manikins and a fabrication laboratory for crafting dental appliances.

“It’s surpassed every vision I had and already feels like home,” said student Anna Ceniceros from Clarendon, Texas. “I’m excited to be in the clinic and work in the operation rooms – I’m already picturing myself helping patients here.”

Members of the inaugural class were present during a June 22 ribbon-cutting for the Texas Tech Dental Oral Health Clinic. They were joined by donors, community leaders and elected officials.

To improve the accessibility of oral health care in the community, the Hunt School of Dental Medicine offers reduced-cost dental care in the public clinic, which expects to have over 60,000 patient encounters annually by 2025.

The state-of-the-art clinic includes nine multipurpose suites, two functional needs suites, five pediatric suites, five oral surgery suites and 130 student-learning operatories where students will treat patients under the supervision of world-class faculty members. With a total of 145 treatment chairs, the clinic is the largest in El Paso.

“The Hunt School of Dental Medicine will be a change agent for health in the Borderland,” said Richard C. Black, D.D.S., M.S., dean of the Hunt School of Dental Medicine. “With 42% of the inaugural class hailing from West Texas and border regions in Texas, we’re focused on our patients having access to the highest quality care in the region, while also preparing students to be culturally competent providers.”

The next few years are expected to be filled with historic firsts at the dental school and clinic as students brighten up smiles on the TTUHSC El Paso campus and in the Borderland. • • •
42% of Hunt School of Dental Medicine students hail from West Texas and border regions of Texas.
The Hunt School of Dental Medicine’s Spanish-language immersion course with medical students is the first of its kind.

Clinical experience at the Hunt School of Dental Medicine starts early, with students training in the Dental Learning Center and Texas Tech Dental Oral Health Clinic as early as their first semester.
Texas Tech Dental Oral Health Clinic visitors will soon be welcomed by an 8-foot sculpture created by renowned El Paso artist Julio Sanchez De Alba.

Known locally and worldwide for his sculptures, Sanchez De Alba’s piece for the clinic is an homage to the teamwork it took to establish the state-of-the-art facility, as well as the Hunt School of Dental Medicine, in El Paso.

The sculpture will incorporate three red, green and blue human figures holding hands. It’s a nod to the logo of the Paso del Norte Health Foundation, a major supporter of the clinic and Hunt School of Dental Medicine. With a steel frame and fiberglass exterior, Sanchez De Alba’s creation will be built to survive in El Paso’s weather, and will welcome visitors for decades to come.

“The design has always reminded me of a diverse group of people working together. That’s what the clinic is doing for El Paso,” Sanchez De Alba said. “I love that concept, and I’m proud to bring it to life on the TTUHSC El Paso campus.”
MEET THE CLASS!

Hunt School of Dental Medicine students share their experiences, motivation and dreams for the future

“Through the Hunt School of Dental Medicine, there is a convergence of support. The community and the school are providing an opportunity for us to educate the region about the importance of oral health and increased access to dental care for those who may not be able to afford it.”

Jeremy Masten
Cairo, Georgia

“I’m on the road to becoming a third-generation dentist in my family, but a first-generation dentist in the United States. I believe the Hunt School of Dental Medicine is the best place for me because of the vulnerable populations I’ll serve in my hometown as I continue my family’s legacy.”

Paola Olivares Carzoli
El Paso, Texas
Our inaugural class of future dentists is working #TTTogetherForElPaso, ensuring smiles in our community shine bright. The class of 2025 is made up of 40 students who were chosen from over 900 applicants from across the country. Read more about their backgrounds, plans for the future, and things you’d be surprised to learn by scanning this QR code.

“"It really is such an honor to be part of this group. We’ll always be the inaugural class, and I feel that we’ll have a unique opportunity to shape how the program looks for the future. We’re incredibly lucky to be the first group of students to use the amazing facilities on campus and learn about the state-of-the-art equipment.”

Alanna Huth
Yucaipa, California

“"Being an immigrant in America and pursuing higher education is one of the challenges that’s shaped me into who I am today. It taught me to value all voices and ensure my voice is heard. I know how it feels to have limited access to dental care, and in the future, I see myself traveling around the world practicing in underserved areas.”

Dat Le
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Dr. Angela Chi brings 20 years of experience to the Hunt School of Dental Medicine

By Leonard Martinez
Photography by Tommie Morelos

With the opening of the Hunt School of Dental Medicine, world-class faculty have joined the school to form a solid foundation for educating El Paso’s dental students.

Professor Angela C. Chi, D.M.D., is board certified in oral and maxillofacial pathology, and is the only board certified oral pathologist in the region. Her specialty of dentistry focuses on diagnosing and treating diseases in the mouth and jaw.

“Oral pathology is a very specialized area of dentistry, but we also have primary training as dentists,” Dr. Chi said. “Although there are pathologists who are M.D. trained to help with pathology of the head and neck region, oral maxillofacial pathologists have the unique background to understand both the dental component and the pathology.”

Dr. Chi graduated with a Doctor of Dental Medicine from the Harvard School of Dental Medicine in 1998. She served in the United States Navy Dental Corps while completing an advanced education in the general dentistry program, and practiced as a general dentist in Japan, where she cared for sailors aboard the USS Kitty Hawk.

“It was important to have that experience as a general dentist prior to my training in oral pathology,” Dr. Chi said. “It’s been beneficial to wholly understand more of the clinical aspects of patient care.”

In addition to her clinical experience, Dr. Chi has co-authored more than 100 publications, including Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology, a textbook widely used in schools across the U.S. and abroad.

Her experience will help as she mentors Hunt School of Dental Medicine students embarking on their journey to become future dentists. Her goal is to prepare students for every aspect of dentistry.

“What’s really important for our students is to understand the connection between oral and systemic health— that’s a big part of oral pathology,” Dr. Chi said. “Our goal is to prepare confident, competent dentists who are ready to handle whatever comes their way and to look at oral health care holistically.”
COMMITTED TO CARE.

Dr. Ana Karina Mascarenhas focuses on public health at the Hunt School of Dental Medicine

Ana Karina Mascarenhas, B.D.S., M.P.H., Dr.P.H., FDS RCPS (Glasg), associate dean of research, joins the Hunt School of Dental Medicine ready to make a difference in the Paso del Norte region.

Dr. Mascarenhas received her Bachelor of Dental Surgery from Goa Dental College and Hospital in Goa, India, and her Master of Public Health and Doctor of Public Health from the University of Michigan. With her background in public health, Dr. Mascarenhas researches prevention, access to care and health services.

“The opportunities of a new school are what drew me here,” Dr. Mascarenhas said. “I’m very passionate about public health, and the Hunt School of Dental Medicine focuses on training dental students in a way that’s more community-oriented.”

Dr. Mascarenhas looks forward to getting students engaged in the community, which is historically known as an underserved area. The school, its students and the Texas Tech Dental Oral Health Clinic can make a big difference.

Dr. Mascarenhas believes the dental school can work together with community leaders to reduce the number of oral health diseases and other conditions – like diabetes and obesity – in the Borderland that influence them.

“Training dental students to talk with patients about obesity and diabetes, and providing families with the knowledge and resources to improve healthy eating, physical activity and how our oral health is all connected is important as we build our curriculum,” Dr. Mascarenhas said. “This is a goal we’re focused on alongside our students and community.”

Her mentorship and expertise, along with a strong commitment to the school’s mission, will help Hunt School of Dental Medicine students as they learn more about the community and provide culturally competent care for patients now and in the future. •••
TOGETHER FOR

EL PASO DEL NORTE

Community support ensures bright futures

By Danielle Urbina
Photography by Tommie Morelos

It takes a forward-thinking community to improve the health and livelihood of a region. Like the TTUHSC El Paso schools before it, the Hunt School of Dental Medicine got its start from local leaders and organizations who believed in the immense change a school of its kind would bring to El Paso and West Texas.

In celebration of its 25th anniversary and commitment to improving health in the region, the Paso del Norte Health Foundation announced a $5 million grant to the Hunt School of Dental Medicine in August. While the foundation’s previous grant of $6 million in 2016 funded the dental school’s startup efforts, their
most recent contribution will support dental school operations, enabling the school to become a leader in oral health care for the region.

So far, the foundation’s gift has allowed the dental school to develop its innovative curriculum, hire world-class faculty, recruit its inaugural class of students and leverage state funding.

“We believe that the Health Foundation’s commitment to the new dental school will increase the awareness and importance of oral health, train and educate future dentists to address the shortage of providers for our region, support community dental clinics, provide faculty appointments for local dentists, and contribute to the overall economic growth in the region,” said Tracy J. Yellen, CEO of the Paso del Norte Health Foundation.

In June, the GECU Foundation announced a $323,000 gift to the Hunt School of Dental Medicine in support of the Dean’s Excellence Fund and student scholarships. The gift was announced during the historic ribbon-cutting for the Texas Tech Dental Oral Health Clinic. “GECU’s philosophy is people helping people,” said Crystal Long, president and CEO of GECU.

“"Our foundation’s commitment to TTUHSC El Paso is a commitment to the health of our entire community.”

– Crystal Long, President and CEO, GECU

Our foundation’s commitment to TTUHSC El Paso is a commitment to the health of our entire community. Our aim is to elevate El Paso through education, community programs and philanthropy giving.”

The GECU Foundation’s gift will create a wave of change, helping to fund the dental education of talented students throughout Texas and in El Paso who have dreams of becoming dentists and serving underserved parts of the state. •••
Local philanthropists and businesses equip state-of-the-art clinical suites

Through impactful gifts, the Hunt School of Dental Medicine and the Texas Tech Dental Oral Health Clinic got a strong start from extended members of the TTUHSC El Paso family. Prior to its ribbon-cutting ceremony, several community members supported the oral health clinic with funds for student scholarships, specialized equipment and patient treatments.

Community champions, including El Paso Electric, Marathon Petroleum Foundation, Bank of America, Ethos Financial, the Feinberg Foundation, High Desert Oral & Facial Surgery, and Marina Monsivais and Dr. Paul Ro, had multi-purpose suites named in their honor for their transformative contributions to oral health in the Borderland. Multi-purpose suites in the clinic will serve several needs, including routine dental care and cleansings, for all patients in the region. These important gifts have equipped and supplied suites to make them operational for students and faculty, and to provide affordable services to underserved patients.

Additionally, support from Ethos Financial and Bank of America also established two suites that will give students the opportunity to learn proper techniques, treatments and sensitivities for the oral health care of special needs patients. The suites are the only in the region that feature a wheelchair lift and a multifunctional bariatric treatment chair.

Thanks to Kemp Smith LLP, Gene and Sherri Wolf, and El Paso dentist Dr. Dennis Care and his family, El Paso’s youngest patients will be cared for in state-of-the-art pediatric suites. These suites will provide hands-on educational opportunities for Hunt School of Dental Medicine students, while also teaching local children and their families to develop healthy dental hygiene habits early on. Lack of dental care is a public health concern that affects all residents of Texas. In children and adolescents in particular, lack of dental upkeep impacts daily productivity and is linked to malnutrition, school absences and lower academic performance.

As part of its mission to improve access to specialized oral health care, the Texas Tech Dental Oral Health Clinic also features surgical suites focused on serious oral health conditions so patients in the region don’t have to travel far for treatment. Generous gifts from Dr. David and Kacey Brown, as well as Dr. Jaime and Karina Rivera, have equipped the clinic’s surgical suites so faculty providers can perform oral and maxillofacial procedures, and more.

With the help of community supporters, the Texas Tech Dental Oral Health Clinic is one step closer to combating oral health disparities in El Paso and West Texas. Their generosity will touch the lives of Borderland residents through education and access to oral health care for years to come. •••
PRECEPTORSHIP: THE INTANGIBLES OF MEDICINE

By Mariah Perkins | Photography by Tommie Morelos
After completing the first year of medical school, it's hard to ascertain what the next couple of months should consist of. Should you study vigorously, take the whole summer off, or something in between? I opted for a meet-in-the-middle opportunity with the Texas Family Medicine Preceptorship Program. The Texas Academy of Family Physicians grants first- and second-year medical students the opportunity to work with skilled physicians to see firsthand what this field of medicine is like.

For the month of July, I was matched with Dr. Adnan Yousuf in Houston, Texas. While I was confident in my education so far, I was nervous to put it into practice. Dr. Yousuf and his team made me feel more at ease with kind words and motivation. He works both as a primary care physician in the greater Houston area and as an internist in a neighboring hospital. This two-for-one educational opportunity was better than I could've possibly imagined.

Seeing clinical presentations in real life is far more than what a textbook could depict. In the clinic, I developed my physician-patient interactions and listened to what patients told me rather than solely relying on their charts. Not only was this part of Dr. Yousuf’s philosophy, but a focus of the Foster School of Medicine’s curriculum as we prepare to become future generations of compassionate physicians.

One of Dr. Yousuf’s favorite sayings is, “No matter what, always do right by your patient.” Regardless of challenges, Dr. Yousuf ensured every patient felt heard and cared for. I was fascinated by conditions presented in the clinic – from neurofibromatosis to scleroderma – and had the opportunity to listen to the vibration of a ventricular wall on a real beating heart, instead of a recording. Each day ignited my interest to learn and do more.

I left the preceptorship with so much more than four weeks of seeing patients. Dr. Yousuf made sure to explain why becoming a physician was his calling and pushed me to remember what got me to where I am today. I thought about my mom in a hospital bed as I painted her nails, knowing that I needed to help find cures for cancer. I reminisced on the difficulties of finishing my undergraduate degree after the passing of my father. Those feelings allowed me to reflect on my calling and continually motivate me to become a physician.

It's the hard work, the extra step, the smile or hold of your patient’s hand that takes precedence in caring for someone. As I continue my education in El Paso, I hope to bring these intangibles into the characteristics of the clinician I become. •••

Mariah Perkins is a second-year student at the Foster School of Medicine.
When they’re not educating the next generation of health care professionals, our TTUHSC El Paso faculty is advancing their expertise through training, research and participation in professional organizations. By going the extra mile, they bring innovative treatment and knowledge to provide the Paso del Norte region with world-class patient care.

**Dr. Diego De La Mora Appointed to State Committee**

In March, Gov. Greg Abbott appointed Diego De la Mora, M.D., chief health informatics officer at TTUHSC El Paso, to the Texas Correctional Managed Health Care Committee. The committee coordinates statewide policies for health care within the criminal justice system.

Dr. De la Mora will address emergency preparedness and optimization of telemedicine in Texas correctional facilities. Collaboration with state institutions will help expand the university’s reach and meet our mission of serving West Texas communities.

**TTP El Paso Hosts Gallstone Surgery Training**

Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso’s Department of Surgery hosted 16 surgeons in February for training on an advanced gallstone-removal procedure.

The surgeons trained for laparoscopic transcystic common bile duct exploration (LCBDE), which uses a thin scope to capture and remove gallstones. The minimally invasive procedure reduces patients’ time in the hospital. TTUHSC El Paso’s role as a LCBDE training hub will help address biliary disease, a significant health problem in the region.
Dr. Richard McCallum Elected President of El Paso County Medical Society

Richard McCallum, M.D., professor in the Department of Internal Medicine, will serve a one-year term as president of the El Paso County Medical Society.

The society has a membership of approximately 800 physicians, residents and medical students. As president, Dr. McCallum is working to meet El Paso’s health needs and address challenges on the border by engaging with other counties and the Texas Legislature.

Dr. Laxman Gangwani Receives $2.1 Million NIH Grant

Laxman Gangwani, Ph.D., a researcher in TTUHSC El Paso’s Center of Emphasis in Neurosciences, received a $2.1 million National Institutes of Health grant for research on the accumulation of RNA-DNA hybrid strands, known as R-loops, and their effect on neurodegenerative diseases. These diseases include spinal muscular atrophy and ALS, which cause muscle weakness and affect physical function.
THE NATURE OF SUCCESS

Gayle Greve Hunt’s reflection on transformation and resilience at the Hunt School of Nursing

By Katherine Vandertulip | Photography by Tommie Morelos

In autumn, the West Texas desert witnesses a metamorphosis of dragonflies. It is a change akin to that on display at the annual graduation of nursing students at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso.

“Dragonflies are often the symbol for transformation, rebirth and change,” said Stephanie Woods, Ph.D., R.N., dean of the Hunt School of Nursing. “For our students, the nursing school experience embodies amazing change and promise.”

For Gayle Greve Hunt, co-founder of the Woody and Gayle Hunt Family Foundation, dragonflies are also an emblem of nature in the Chihuahuan Desert. And like the desert itself, El Paso is “welcoming, supportive and resilient,” said Hunt.

It has been more than a decade since Hunt and the foundation invested $10 million in the Hunt School of Nursing with hopes of transforming regional higher education and the economic landscape.

“Nursing is a profession we’ll always need, and nurses provide a tremendous amount of care, easing the burden on patients and their families,” said Hunt. “Even with 800 nursing school graduates to date, our community continues to experience a nursing shortage.”

Before the Hunt School of Nursing opened its doors for the first time in 2010, El Paso County faced a 40% shortage of nurses when compared to the national average. But with each passing year, the future of health care has become brighter in El Paso. Thanks to the fact that most graduates stay to practice in the region, that shortage has been reduced to 20%.

As El Paso and the Hunt School of Nursing flourish, Hunt recognizes that growth comes through tenacity.

“I love that this city comes together when there is a need. We’ve seen this recently through targeted tragedy and a global pandemic, but I also see it every day in those I interact with,” she said. “Over the decades, I’ve seen El Pasoans persevere, innovate, and support each other, and I’m so proud of how far we’ve come. This is a city that wants to succeed and grow. This is a city that will stick together, no matter what. I’m proud to be among those who call El Paso home.”

Scan the QR code for more on the Hunt Family Foundation’s transformative impact on the HSON.
A Full-Circle Career

A MEMBER OF THE HUNT SCHOOL OF NURSING’S INAUGURAL CLASS INSPIRES EL PASO’S FUTURE NURSING STUDENTS

By Aaron Baramontes | Photography by Tommie Morelos

The lessons Fabiola Armendariz, D.N.P., M.S.N., R.N., learned at the Hunt School of Nursing didn’t end when she received her degree in 2013. She still applies them while educating young El Pasoans who aspire to become nurses.

As one of the school’s inaugural class graduates, Dr. Armendariz is still learning. Most recently, she received her doctorate of nursing practice.

“The Hunt School of Nursing prepared me for my career from day one. They advised us on our careers and motivated us to pursue higher-level jobs,” Dr. Armendariz said. “That helped me evolve professionally, and I set a long-term goal to become an educator and prepare others for their future.”

Dr. Armendariz is the Health Professions Academy Coordinator at Socorro High School, one of El Paso County’s oldest health magnet schools. This year, the academy introduced the BSN Nursing Program, a pipeline to the Hunt School of Nursing.

“Students at Socorro are interested in attending the Hunt School of Nursing,” Dr. Armendariz said. “I regularly share my experiences with them as part of the first class, advising on what they need to do to get there and what to expect along the way.”

She credits the Hunt School of Nursing for her ability to connect with students, just as her professors connected with her.

“I take what they taught us and apply it as an educator,” Dr. Armendariz said. “The strategies they used seemed rigorous at the time, but it ensured our success. I bring that mentality to Socorro so the students remain motivated.”

Just as Dr. Armendariz’ career has grown, she’s amazed at the continued growth on the TTUHSC El Paso campus.

“It’s been a great journey to see the school evolve over the years. I’m amazed by the new buildings and how many students there are now,” Dr. Armendariz said. “I was lucky to work with my outstanding peers and the great professors who became mentors. I can only hope I have the same influence on my students.”
Heart of the Community

LOCAL BUSINESSES RAISE THOUSANDS IN HUNT SCHOOL OF NURSING SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS

By Danielle Urbina | Photography by Tommie Morelos

Thanks to the El Paso business community, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso celebrated a successful Champions of Trusted Heroes scholarship campaign in July. The campaign raised over $100,000 for the Hunt School of Nursing’s Scholarship Fund. The fund provides scholarships and other financial and educational support to help students complete their degrees.

As “Signature Champions of Trusted Heroes,” Lone Star Title Company and El Paso Electric helped TTUHSC El Paso kick off the campaign in March, each with $25,000 gifts. Local businesses showed their support by matching employee contributions, including Casa Auto Dealers, where over 90 employees donated to the campaign.

OTHER BUSINESSES OPENING DOORS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF NURSES INCLUDE:

- El Paso Chihuahuas
- In*Situ Architecture
- L&F Distributors
- National Restaurant Supply
- Northern Pass Properties
- Plastic Molding Technology Inc.
- State Farm
- Sunflower Bank
- Transtelco
- United Bank of El Paso
- Vista Markets
- Western Heritage Bank
- WestStar Bank

Our community sponsors are the meaning behind #TTtogetherForElPaso.
Joshua Kallman, M.D., believes every aspiring physician should remember why they started their journey: to better the community.

That’s part of his goal as a fellow in the Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics Department at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. That philosophy was reinforced by his time at the Foster School of Medicine.

“It’s vital to have close ties with the community and to keep advocating for underserved populations,” Dr. Kallman said. “Those principles were instilled in us from the beginning.”

Dr. Kallman was happy to learn the Foster School of Medicine’s curriculum still includes its immersion program and medical Spanish requirement.

“During immersion, students get to better understand El Paso and its needs,” Dr. Kallman said. “The Spanish component emphasizes that it’s not just about medicine, but also serving patients as best as possible.”

Taking those lessons to heart has driven Dr. Kallman toward a successful career, and the education he received in El Paso prepared him to excel.

“The early clinical training was important,” Dr. Kallman said. “Curriculum at the Foster School of Medicine is so integrated that you hit the ground running by seeing patients and having realistic experiences in the simulation lab.”

After recently visiting the growing TTUHSC El Paso campus, he said he still feels at home.

“I felt like a medical student again, even though I graduated five years ago. Back then, the Medical Education Building was where I spent my time, and now classes and labs are spread out among newer buildings,” Dr. Kallman said. “I’ve always had faith in this community, so seeing this expansion happening to accommodate the growing number of students is expected, but still inspiring.”

Following his fellowship, Dr. Kallman wants to continue as a faculty member of Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. Then, he plans to see more of El Paso.

“My long-term goal is to return to my hometown and join TTUHSC El Paso’s clinical faculty,” he said. • •
Nursing school was a time of growth and discovery for Veronica Ruiz. While studying at the Hunt School of Nursing, she would think about the wide range of nursing specialties available, and which would best fit her personality.

“I had areas of interest in mind, such as float-pool in pediatrics,” Ruiz said. “I felt certain that I would pursue the pediatric intensive care unit or the neonatal intensive care unit until the morning of Aug. 3, 2019.”

That morning, Ruiz was completing her student clinical rotation in the emergency department at University Medical Center of El Paso when victims of the Walmart mass shooting began to arrive. Twenty-three people were killed in the shooting, and more than two dozen were wounded.

“I witnessed horrid and unfortunate outcomes in the lives of so many people,” Ruiz said. “In that chaos, sadness and terror, all hands were on deck. One nurse who was my preceptor that day took charge. She kept us focused. Her knowledge was grounding during an emotional blizzard. This nurse, this hero, had a background in adult intensive care, and that’s when I decided I wanted to be that kind of nurse. The world of intensive care has become my career choice since then.”

That inspiration motivated Ruiz to pursue a career as a traveling nurse. Last December, she went on crisis assignments as an ICU nurse, caring for patients as the COVID-19 pandemic raged across the United States. Her work has taken her to Dallas, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

“Nurses face many challenges, but I can tell you that the most prevalent challenge during the pandemic is fatigue. We’re tired – physically, emotionally, spiritually tired,” Ruiz said.

Her education and experiences at the Hunt School of Nursing taught her how to face these challenges and helped form unforgettable bonds with her peers.

“Our cohort was, is and will forever be a family to each other,” Ruiz said. “You can’t go through those unique challenges and not care for each other.”
With an eye toward science from an early age, Joshua P. Torres had unique heroes.

“The highest marks I received during high school and my early college years were always related to science and mathematics,” Torres said. “That explains why my childhood heroes include Mr. Louis Pasteur and Dr. Giuseppe Moscati.”

In 2012, on his way to enroll in a finance and mathematics program at New Mexico State University, Torres told his mother he envisioned a future in health care. That U-turn on the highway changed his path, and he returned to El Paso with big goals.

Torres graduated with a master’s degree from TTUHSC El Paso’s Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences in May. It’s his second degree from TTUHSC El Paso – he earned a Bachelor of Science in nursing from the Hunt School of Nursing in 2016 and now attends the Foster School of Medicine. Torres is the only student in TTUHSC El Paso’s history who’s attended three of the university’s four schools.

“Nursing school helped substantiate my calling for the health sciences,” Torres said. “Both nursing school and working as a registered nurse at University Medical Center of El Paso focused my attention on my job and enhanced my critical thinking abilities. It proved invaluable in fulfilling the graduate requirements of the GSBS, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Biomedical science combines three areas of study that have always resounded with Torres: biology, biochemistry and the health field. He chose the master’s program because it’s well-rounded.

“It robustly covers the foundational knowledge essential for a future researcher, including biochemistry, general and advanced laboratory methods, and biostatistics,” Torres said. “The GSBS also integrates advanced instruction on a wide range of topics.”

Ultimately, it was TTUHSC El Paso’s commitment to service and giving back to the community that solidified his choice.

“TTUHSC El Paso encourages the involvement of graduate, medical, dental and nursing students in community events for the betterment of El Paso,” Torres said. “All-embracing, the GSBS was the preeminent choice.” • •
As a fellow with the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso Department of Family and Community Medicine’s Sports Medicine program, Chenai Nettey, M.D., earned a valuable education managing various musculoskeletal diagnoses and concussions. But she said her most significant experience as a fellow was the camaraderie she found within the community.

“Being a sports medicine physician means doing a lot of work within such a unique community,” Dr. Nettey said. “I worked alongside athletic trainers diagnosing and treating musculoskeletal problems athletes endure with Bowie High School’s athletic department, UTEP’s athletic department and with El Paso Locomotive FC. I also attended many games, standing at the sidelines ready to respond to injuries.”

Dr. Nettey, now a family medicine doctor with Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso, rotated with several musculoskeletal specialists in El Paso, including physical therapists, orthopaedic surgeons and radiologists, to get a better understanding of musculoskeletal diagnoses and treatments. The fellowship even allowed her to work at a ski clinic in Park City, Utah. In addition, she presented an interesting case on stroke in a young, relatively healthy football player titled, “Football Practice Took the Strength Right out of Me,” at the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine’s national conference.

Sports medicine intrigued Dr. Nettey early on. During her residency, she shadowed several sports medicine physicians, their fellows and physical therapists.

“I spent time with them on the sideline, in the clinic and in the classroom,” she said. “It helped solidify my choice to go into sports medicine. It also helped me feel a bit more comfortable when I entered the fellowship.”

Sports medicine isn’t the only thing she’s passionate about.

“I find men and women’s health to be interesting because, unfortunately, within many minority communities, health issues that are common to women and men are not openly discussed, and I’d like to help empower them to learn about their health,” Dr. Nettey said. “The diversity in treating women and men is why I chose to practice family medicine.”

And where she chooses to treat patients is another passion.

“The Borderland community offers so many opportunities to treat different and interesting cases that aren’t typically seen away from the border. Working in El Paso for me means that I continue learning every day.”

---

PASSION FOR THE BORDERLAND
Sports Medicine Fellowship graduate treats the borderland community on and off the field

CHENAI NETTEY, M.D.

Graduated: Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso Sports Medicine Fellowship Program, 2021

Assistant Professor, TTUHSC El Paso Department of Family and Community Medicine, and Sports Medicine Faculty

Family Medicine Physician, TTP El Paso
DOMINIC O. BETANCOURT, M.D.

Graduated:
Paul L. Foster School of Medicine, 2021

Hometown:
El Paso, Texas

Resident, Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso at Transmountain

DEEP ROOTS
A lifelong El Pasoan gives back as an inaugural internal medicine resident at TTP El Paso at Transmountain

Photography by Christ Chavez

Much of what motivates Dominic O. Betancourt, M.D., revolves around family and community, something he embraces as a lifelong El Pasoan. But it wasn’t until he attended medical school that he realized how underserved the Borderland was.

“Many patients I encountered early in my education hadn’t seen a physician for many years and for a multitude of reasons, including financial hardship, transportation difficulties and a general reluctance to seek medical advice,” Dr. Betancourt said. “I chose to stay in El Paso so I can give back to the community which gave so much to me.”

Dr. Betancourt graduated from Burges High School and attended UTEP before earning his master’s degree from TTUHSC El Paso’s Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. Along the way, he worked at Big 8 Food Stores, Dominic’s Italian Restaurant and Walgreens. He was working at Physician’s Vascular Services with Dr. Joseph Furlong when he decided to go to medical school at the age of 30.

“I was part of a unique class of medical students based on our experiences, which I believe helped prepare me for residency,” Dr. Betancourt said. “We experienced a global pandemic that significantly impacted El Paso, and we were early in our training during the Aug. 3 shooting. During both of these catastrophic events, I saw El Pasoans embrace each other and refuse to be torn apart by tragedy. I’m honored to be part of such a supportive community.”

As a member of the inaugural class of residents at Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso at Transmountain, Dr. Betancourt knows the internal medicine residency program will transform health care in the region by ensuring exceptional care to all El Pasoans, no matter which side of town they live on.

“While it was a bit intimidating not to have senior residents show us the ropes, the attending physicians have gone above and beyond to guide us through the transition of becoming efficient residents,” Dr. Betancourt said. “Their patience and dedication to educating, along with our eagerness to learn, are molding this program into something truly wonderful.”

As Dr. Betancourt continues serving the underserved, he also makes time for family and loved ones.

“Remaining near my family is one reason I chose to stay in El Paso,” Dr. Betancourt said. “There’s something about Ma’s home cooking and video games with my niece on the weekends that take the edge off hectic weeks.”
Some good fortune, lots of hard work, and a passion for the community prepared Eryn Pynes, M.D., for her residency at Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso at Transmountain. Part of the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso residency program, she is a member of the inaugural class of psychiatry residents who will train at TTP El Paso at Transmountain.

“I was fortunate to have a good education growing up, both in school and at home,” said Dr. Pynes, a member of the inaugural class of residents at Transmountain. “I was able to earn a university degree while having familial support to focus on my studies without having to work at the same time. And I was lucky enough to attend medical school in my hometown of El Paso, where I could have home-cooked meals – and family time – when I needed a break.”

Now that Dr. Pynes is training in the residency program she’d hoped for, with the people she wanted to learn from and co-residents who have quickly become great friends, she knows her journey prepared her well.

“So far, my work has primarily been studying and orienting myself to residency,” Dr. Pynes said. “I’ve been fortunate enough to work with the family medicine clinic at Transmountain and to get some experience in neurology with Dr. Chigolum Eze.”

To her, that work is building the foundation in both primary care and neurology, helping her find her footing as a physician in an area she wants to help the most — psychiatry.

“Adding a psychiatry residency helps relieve the burden on psychiatrists in the El Paso region,” she said. “It will get more boots on the ground at all levels, from consulting with patients in the hospital to long-term outpatient care. I’m confident that it will improve access to critical mental health services in the Borderland.”

Offering that type of support motivates Dr. Pynes to stay local and build a career in medicine that serves the Borderland.

“El Paso is my home. It was an amazing city to both grow up in and get my medical degree in,” Dr. Pynes said. “Now, it’s an equally amazing place to do my residency. I don’t know exactly what the future holds, but I do know this is the city I want to practice in.”

---

CRITICAL FOCUS
A TTP El Paso at Transmountain resident helps improve Borderland access to mental health services

ERYN PYNES, M.D.

Graduated:
Graduated: Paul L. Foster School of Medicine, 2021

Hometown:
El Paso, Texas

Resident, Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso at Transmountain
In 1989, when Rona Fagan started as an orthopaedic nurse with Texas Tech University Regional Academic Health Center, numerous colleagues and community members had the same question.

“People would ask me if I commuted from Lubbock every week,” Fagan said. “They had no idea Texas Tech existed in El Paso, and they were confused about what role we had in the community.”

Plenty has changed since then. Fagan is now a faculty associate in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and Rehabilitation at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso, now an independent university preparing future community health care leaders.

“It’s been amazing watching TTUHSC El Paso grow,” Fagan said. “We have the Foster School of Medicine, the Hunt School of Nursing, the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and now the Hunt School of Dental Medicine. It’s huge, and we have a crucial role in the area.”

Over 30 years ago, Fagan didn’t envision a career as a nurse at a medical school. Now she cannot imagine anything else.

“You watch residents start the program knowing little about orthopaedics, and by the end of their fifth year, they’re experts and become amazing surgeons,” she said. “To be there at the start of their career is special.”

Her role at the university continues to evolve from year to year, but Fagan said it’s kept things interesting.

“Even the way we did things four years ago is different than what we do today, so you need to keep learning, and that’s one of the highlights of the job,” Fagan said. “A career in medical education keeps you engaged because you’re committed to lifelong learning. It’s stimulating as you’re exposed to the most intelligent people in science and education. You also experience the joy and satisfaction of providing the highest level of nursing care to appreciative patients.”

From being an orthopaedic nurse to a faculty associate, Fagan is happy for a career full of memories.

“You know it feels silly to say, but I love all of it,” Fagan said. “There’ve been challenges for myself, the university, my department and our city, but you don’t stay in a position this long unless you love it.”
MAKING AN IMPACT!

Health care heroes at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso touch lives from the time they begin their journeys to graduation and beyond. There’s a lot to celebrate as we begin a new academic year at TTUHSC El Paso, and we’re breaking down barriers to world-class patient care with every future physician, nurse, dentist and researcher who walks through our doors.

Since 2013, more than

60 FOSTER SCHOOL OF MEDICINE GRADUATES
matched to El Paso residency programs, combating the region’s physician shortage.

22% of students from the Foster School of Medicine’s class of 2025 – the school’s largest class to date – are native El Pasoans, and 28% come from counties on the U.S.-Mexico border.

60% of the Hunt School of Dental Medicine’s class of 2025 consider themselves bilingual or multilingual, which will help them provide compassionate and culturally competent care.

42% of students from the Hunt School of Dental Medicine’s inaugural class hail from West Texas and border regions of the state.

92 GRADUATES from its M.S. and post-baccalaureate certificate programs.

64% of GSBS graduates of the 2019-2020 academic year identified as Hispanic.

Since becoming a standalone institution, TTUHSC El Paso has educated more than

1,500 health care professionals who are transforming lives in the Borderland and across the nation.

19 Years

The Hunt School of Nursing is home to the only accelerated B.S.N. program in the region, where students can earn their B.S.N. in 16 months and enter the workforce soon after.

71% of Hunt School of Nursing graduates from the 2019-2020 academic year identified as Hispanic, and nearly 50% call El Paso their hometown.
THE HANDS OF A SUPERHERO
WORLD-CLASS PATIENT CARE INSPIRES A GIFT BENEFITING EL PASO CHILDREN
By Danielle Urbina
Photography by Warren Love

Luca and his family joined by TTUHSC El Paso leadership, Dr. Shawn Diamond, the Paso del Norte Community Foundation and local community leaders.

Shawn Diamond, M.D., doesn’t have super strength, nor can he fly over the city faster than the speed of sound – but to one local family, he’s a superhero.

Dr. Diamond, an assistant professor in the Department of Surgery at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso, specializes in plastic and reconstructive surgery as a provider at Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso. It was there he met Luca Martinez, a toddler in need of hand surgery.

Luca was born with two thumbs on his left hand, a condition known as preaxial polydactyly. His parents, El Pasoans Mila and Carlos Martinez, originally scheduled surgery for Luca in Dallas, Texas, but worried about the complications of travel and temporary housing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The couple was thrilled to learn from a friend that Dr. Diamond, a world-renowned plastic surgeon, was practicing in their hometown of El Paso and able to help their son.

“My late father-in-law, Dr. Luis Carlos Martinez, was a very well-known cardiovascular surgeon in El Paso, so my husband grew up understanding the importance of access to a great medical care system at home,” Mila said.

Luca’s surgery was completed in 2021 by Dr. Diamond, and the results brought a sigh of relief to his family. The surgery’s success encouraged a gift of gratitude that ensures the same life-changing results for Dr. Diamond’s future patients.

In August, the Melinda and Meyer Marcus Family Foundation, through their fund with the Paso del Norte Community Foundation, gifted TTP El Paso $50,000 toward the Pediatric Surgery Excellence Fund at TTUHSC El Paso. Luca is the grandson of Melinda and Meyer Marcus.

Luca was transformed into a superhero – “Supa” Luca – during a family-friendly event on the TTUHSC El Paso campus in celebration of the family’s gift to the university and El Paso community.

“Long gone are the days that specialty surgery has to be done away from home, thanks to persistent recruiting and years of hard work from TTUHSC El Paso and their partners,” said Mila during the gift announcement. “Our family appreciates the hard work that’s been done and continues to be done so local families can have exceptional health care at home. We also want to thank Dr. Diamond for giving our little Luca the most beautiful and functioning thumb.”
Cheering on our FUTURE SOCCER STARS!

#VamosLocos #TTogetherForElPaso

As the official health care provider of choice for the El Paso Locomotive Youth Soccer Club, Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso is keeping Borderland youth healthy so they can go for the goal and achieve their dreams.