RESILIENCE
in darkness

SPECIAL 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY EDITION
TTUHSC El Paso has always been on a mission to serve the community. Since 2013, the Foster School of Medicine’s Medical Student Run Clinic has delivered on that mission as a go-to center of health care for the residents of Sparks, Texas.

“United as One” tells the story of the Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso and TTUHSC El Paso students and residents who answered the call on a day when El Paso needed them the most.

On a day marked by tragedy, Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso and TTUHSC El Paso students and residents exemplified the true meaning of “El Paso Strong.”

TTUHSC El Paso has always been on a mission to serve the community. Since 2013, the Foster School of Medicine’s Medical Student Run Clinic has delivered on that mission as a go-to center of health care for the residents of Sparks, Texas.
In the days and weeks since the events that unfolded at an El Paso Walmart on Aug. 3, our community is still shocked and deeply saddened. On that tragic day, many jumped into action immediately, asking what they could do to help. Many hugged their loved ones tight and watched as images from our city flashed on news broadcasts across the world. Some, including many of our own, spent hours in operating rooms and emergency departments doing what they’ve been trained to do as physicians, residents, medical students and nursing students.

On that day, 22 Borderland residents lost their lives and more than two dozen were injured. Parents and grandparents shielded their children and grandchildren, strangers helped each other to safety, and first responders sprang into action to help save lives. In the minutes, hours and days that followed, health care providers did everything they could to treat victims and keep their families and loved ones at ease.

This community is home to our health sciences center, and when I attended the City of El Paso’s community memorial, I was reminded of how lucky we are to share this vibrant, multicultural city with the wonderful people of El Paso.

That evening, 22 luminarias shined bright as the melodies of “Amazing Grace” and “Amor Eterno” rang through Downtown El Paso. Friends, family, neighbors and strangers all came together to show the world that even in a moment of darkness, our city remains resilient.

As the president of this university, I’ve never been more proud of our TTUHSC El Paso family, and I am eternally grateful for our health care providers who went above and beyond to provide the best possible care to so many. At its core, our mission is about serving the community — the same community that rallied around us as the dream of establishing a health sciences center on the U.S.-Mexico border became a reality.

This year will be one that our university will never forget. The Fall/Winter 2019 edition of TTUHSC El Paso Alumni & Friends is not only our heartfelt reflection on this moment in El Paso’s history, but also a celebration of a significant milestone for the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine.

In 2019, the Foster School of Medicine entered its 10th year of delivering an unparalleled educational experience for students from West Texas and around the world. As dean of the school of medicine, I’m proud to have witnessed how the school has grown and the number of talented physicians it has educated in its first decade.

These pages — full of stories and photos that make up the heart of TTUHSC El Paso — show what we can all accomplish together, and they are a reminder of why we’re here: to help provide a brighter future for the community in which our university calls home.

Our journey of healing is far from over, but I know our TTUHSC El Paso family will continue to support the community in its greatest time of need. We will never forget the 22 lives lost, and as we continue to carry the victims and their families in our hearts, we will find hope and happiness again.

TTUHSC El Paso is, and always will be, El Paso Strong.
IN THE FACE OF TRAGEDY, TEXAS TECH PHYSICIANS OF EL PASO AND TTUHSC EL PASO STUDENTS AND RESIDENTS WORKED TOGETHER TO HEAL

By Leonard Martinez
University Medical Center of El Paso’s emergency room isn’t normally as quiet as a library on a Saturday morning. On an early August Saturday it was particularly quiet, with only a couple of surgeries scheduled and few patients in a usually bustling waiting room.

“It was kind of eerie,” said Veronica Ruiz, an Accelerated B.S.N. student at the Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing. That day, she was working her clinical rotation at UMC. “The nurses we were assigned to said the emergency room wasn’t busy and that it was odd for it to be so quiet. It was like the calm before the storm.”

Nancy Weber, D.O., an emergency medicine physician at UMC who also serves as an assistant professor and vice chair for quality and patient experience for the Department of Emergency Medicine at TTUHSC El Paso, was talking with her resident when that peaceful Saturday was disturbed, midmorning, with a shocking alert that several patients suffering from gunshot wounds were on their way to the hospital.

They were the victims of a mass shooting that took place at an East-Central El Paso Walmart. The day was Aug. 3, 2019. In the hours that followed, Dr. Weber, her team and the world would learn that 22 innocent lives were lost and more than two dozen were injured in what became one of the deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history.
We looked at each other – all the nurses, all the doctors. “Is this for real? Is somebody joking?” said Dr. Weber.

It was real. Within 10 minutes, patients began to arrive.

As the only Level 1 trauma center within a 280-mile radius of El Paso, UMC received 15 gunshot wound victims that day. One adult patient was pronounced dead shortly after arriving at the hospital.

Susan McLean, M.D., FACS, surgeon and director of surgical critical care at UMC, who also serves as a professor in the Department of Surgery at TTUHSC El Paso, was finishing a short surgery when a mass-casualty-incident alert came over the pagers.

Within a few minutes of reporting to the emergency department, Dr. McLean found that all the trauma bays were full. She described the incident as “controlled chaos” as surgeons, emergency medicine physicians, orthopaedic surgeons and residents swarmed the emergency department to care for the incoming wounded.

Preparing for the Worst

Aug. 3 wasn’t the first time Dr. McLean had treated victims of a mass shooting. In September 2008, 11 people were shot and wounded outside an East El Paso nightclub. Seven of the wounded were taken to UMC, then known as Thomason Hospital. All of those patients survived.

Dr. McLean was on that day in 2008 but was called in to help.

“Every experience you have, you get to use your skills and learn something from it,” Dr. McLean said of how tending to the wounded in 2008 helped her on Aug. 3, 2019. She added that mass casualty drills also help emergency department personnel prepare for the worst.

Approximately every 18 months, the Department of Emergency Medicine at TTUHSC El Paso conducts large-scale disaster drills as part of its three-year training program for emergency medicine residents. The department’s disaster drill in 2017 was based on an active-shooter scenario.

The drills typically bring together a wide range of participants, including residents training in other specialties, TTUHSC El Paso medical and nursing students, personnel from the El Paso Fire Department and first-responder trainees from the community. Middle and high school students from area schools have also participated in the drills, sometimes role-playing as simulated patients or training as part of their high schools’ first-responder programs.

“Physician residents and TTUHSC El Paso students have some opportunity during their training to see multiple patients, one after the other, in the emergency department, but it’s very rare that it is at the pace of a mass casualty incident,” said TTUHSC El Paso Professor of Emergency Medicine Stephen W. Borron, M.D., M.S., who helps organize the disaster drills.

“Being able to care for a regular influx of patients and juggle multiple situations — keeping patients alive when you’re taking care of several patients at a time and their conditions are changing very quickly — is a skill set that almost has to be learned outside the emergency department, because fortunately, we don’t see these kinds of incidents frequently,” Dr. Borron said.

TTUHSC El Paso Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine Scott Crawford, M.D., who works with Dr. Borron to organize the drills, said the exercises help emergency responders maintain focus and efficiency in an often-chaotic environment.

“One of the biggest benefits of the drills is that in a relatively controlled setting, they allow individuals to experience the challenge with communication and coordination of care between groups,” said Dr. Crawford, who also serves as director for the
Training and Educational Center for Healthcare Simulation (TECHS) at TTUHSC El Paso.

Alejandro J. Rios Tovar, M.D., had just returned home from a 30-hour shift on Aug. 3 when he received a text to return to the hospital because of the expected influx of wounded patients.

An assistant professor and associate trauma medical director for TTUHSC El Paso’s Department of Surgery, Dr. Rios Tovar was involved in one surgery that day but said he used what he learned from mass casualty drills to help in other ways.

“Dr. McLean was already in the operating room with one of the shooting victims, so I took charge to coordinate who needed surgery,” Dr. Rios Tovar said, mentioning it’s something he did during a disaster drill.

Dr. Rios Tovar participated in disaster drills while completing his general surgery residency at TTUHSC El Paso from 2011 to 2016.

“I would always take the drills seriously as if they were real. The mass casualty drills help, and it showed on the day of the shooting,” said Dr. Rios Tovar. “Everybody knew what they were supposed to do.”

Though prepared, Dr. Rios Tovar said the experience is one that still haunts him.

In a testimony before the House Judiciary Committee on Sept. 28, he recounted difficult moments in the operating room that day.

“I'm not a military surgeon, but what I saw looked like a war zone,” said Dr. Rios Tovar.

He remembered the first patient he began to treat – a woman with a shoulder wound – who had been talking but then became lifeless. He and his resident worked quickly to begin manual cardiac compressions, but after several minutes passed, they knew their efforts would not be enough to save her life.

“That first patient haunts me every night; I wish I could have done more,” said Dr. Rios Tovar. “I saw her autopsy recently to try to get some closure – she was protecting her child, so she was actually shot in the back and through her shoulder ... I hope she died knowing she protected her child from the same fate.”

Teammwork

Esai Barrios, an Accelerated B.S.N. student at the Hunt School of Nursing who worked in the UMC ER on Aug. 3, said he is grateful he had been able to develop his nursing skills in simulations where instructors could correct students if they weren’t doing something right.

“We had the opportunity to learn how to start an IV correctly or give a blood transfusion correctly while in school,” Barrios said. “That way, when we had to do it on real patients, we knew how to do it.”

In a situation that nursing students typically do not experience during their clinical rotations, students from the Hunt School of Nursing were quick to jump in when they were asked to help. On that day, 17 nursing students helped treat patients at Del Sol Medical Center, while 10 more assisted at UMC.

Dr. McLean is quick to point out that it was a team effort that day that kept things running as smoothly as they could in such an unusual and stressful situation.

“It was a great amount of teamwork — from multiple departments and their physicians, to nurses, techs, administrators and housekeeping,” Dr. McLean said.

Barrios agreed, saying the experience was a reminder of what it means to be a nurse.

“'I'll never forget the stories behind the people,’” he said. “They went to Walmart and lost their husband or another relative. It was heartbreaking for me talking to these patients and consoling them and their families.”

“The job of a nurse is to be an advocate for patients and communicate with their families in hopes of providing some sense of relief. I was in shock — I think we all were. But we were there for each other and we did the best we could that day, just like every day. It was a team effort.”

On that day, and on the days that followed, it was the helping hands of many that made saving lives possible. The date, Aug. 3, 2019, is permanently etched into both El Paso’s history and the memories of many TTUHSC El Paso students and TTP El Paso physicians.

The idea of teamwork and togetherness, however, continues to be symbolic of what TTUHSC El Paso truly is: the coming together of health care professionals from backgrounds of every kind to help heal the community not only now, but for years to come.
COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

GECU PARTNERS WITH TTUHSC EL PASO TO ADVANCE HEALTH CARE IN WEST TEXAS

This year, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso gained a new community partner as we teamed up for health with GECU.

In May, GECU announced a gift of $5,000 for nursing scholarships and $4,000 to support the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine’s Medical Student Run Clinic (MSRC).

The MSRC provides free primary health care screenings and other health care services to the Sparks community in far East El Paso County. Volunteer work at the clinic provides students with an opportunity to work in a clinical environment while developing a relationship with the local community.

“We are so grateful to be a part of the incredible work and impact that Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso is making in our community,” said GECU President and CEO Crystal Long. “We hope that students will achieve their goals through the incomparable resources and opportunities that TTUHSC El Paso provides.”

Nursing scholarships are especially important in El Paso to assist students at the Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing who normally could not afford school.

In September, GECU continued in their support of TTUHSC El Paso students by contributing $25,000 to the Decade Scholarship as a major sponsor of the “Red Tie Affair For A White Coat Occasion” celebration that will be held on Feb. 28, 2020. All event proceeds will go toward medical student scholarships with a focus of recruiting students from El Paso and across West Texas who will remain or return to the region to serve their community.

In October, Wells Fargo announced a $25,000 grant in support of students attending the Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing. The funds will provide a safety net for students facing unexpected financial challenges as they complete their nursing programs.

“At Wells Fargo, we always look for opportunities to partner with educational institutions; we feel it’s extremely important for us to invest in our future,” said Ryan McGrath, Wells Fargo area business banking manager. “Hopefully, the students who are receiving these funds can use them to bridge the gap and accelerate through their nursing programs so that they don’t have to put a pause on their education.”

Stephanie Woods, Ph.D., M.S.N., dean of the Hunt School of Nursing, emphasized the importance of these funds, especially as the state of Texas faces a projected shortfall of nearly 16,000 registered nurses by 2030.

“Having access to these funds is so valuable to the students and to us,” said Dr. Woods. “It allows us to extend them a lifeline so that they do not get derailed in their plan to graduate.”

Thanks to generous contributions from community partners like Wells Fargo, the Hunt School of Nursing will continue to achieve its goals of increasing the percentage of students who graduate on time, ultimately helping to address the critical nursing shortage.

“We really cannot thank our community supporters enough,” said Dr. Woods. “Our students deserve for this community to invest in them, and we have a number of good people in this community who want to do just that.”

For more about the impact of community partnership, visit bit.ly/WFpartnership.
Both faculty and students at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso play critical roles in the fight against cancer, from education and prevention, to diagnosis, to the discovery of new treatments. Students from the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine conduct screenings in the clinics where they volunteer, and faculty members carry out research to expand potential treatments of various cancers.

This important work relies heavily on the support of foundations and other entities with a vested interest in combating cancer at every level. In this edition of TTUHSC El Paso Alumni & Friends, we are proud to highlight three nonprofit foundations who have made the crucial work of our TTUHSC El Paso students and faculty possible.

In their efforts to raise breast cancer awareness and to promote early detection, the American Breast Cancer Foundation (ABCF) and the National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF) have provided ongoing support of the Foster School of Medicine’s Medical Student Run Clinic. The MSRC provides diagnostic, preventive and educational care to residents in the community of Sparks just outside the El Paso city limits.

In 2019, the NBCF donated a $10,000 gift, and the ABCF a $7,500 gift, to the MSRC for a combined total of $17,500, which will provide screening and diagnostic mammograms and ultrasounds to the uninsured and underserved population in Sparks. It is expected that, through their joint efforts, 90 to 100 mammograms will be given, and approximately 20% of those will lead to follow-up testing with ultrasound and/or a diagnostic mammogram.

Both the ABCF and the NBCF strive to have breast cancer cases identified as early as possible so patients who test positive can be immediately referred for treatment. Additionally, funding from both foundations will be used to provide health education to residents on overall breast health, preventive care, important signs and symptoms to watch for and discuss with health care providers, and how to properly conduct a breast self-exam at home. Health education discussions and materials are provided in English and Spanish.

Without funding from the ABCF and the NBCF, women in this community would have had little or no other means for screening, and those diagnosed could have gone untreated until the disease progressed further in its course.

In June 2019, the Lizanell and Colbert Coldwell Foundation awarded $100,000 to Ramadevi Subramani Reddy, Ph.D., to study the effectiveness of gedunin in treating pancreatic cancer. Dr. Subramani Reddy is a researcher in the Department of Molecular and Translational Medicine’s Center of Emphasis in Cancer. Gedunin is a compound derived from the neem tree, also known as Indian lilac or nimtree. Initial studies have shown promising results in targeting pancreatic cancer cells, and this study aims to determine if gedunin can stop further growth and regeneration of these cells. Currently, pancreatic cancer is the fourth-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States and is projected to become the second-leading cause by 2020. It is the only major cancer with a five-year survival rate of less than 6%, making this an important study with the potential to create major breakthroughs in future treatment of this deadly disease.

MAMMOS ON THE MOVE – A STATE-OF-THE-ART MOBILE MAMMOGRAPHY BUS OPERATED BY DESERT IMAGING – HELPS PROVIDE EASY ACCESS TO MAMMOGRAMS FOR WOMEN IN RURAL COMMUNITIES.
CONNECT + INSPIRE
FROM ON-CAMPUS EVENTS TO ALUMNI REUNIONS, THE TTUHSC EL PASO FAMILY AND UNIVERSITY SUPPORTERS CAME TOGETHER FOR GOOD CAUSES

TTUHSC EL PASO ALUMNI AND FRIENDS SOCIAL HOUR
In May, TTUHSC El Paso held an alumni and friends social hour at Park Tavern in Downtown El Paso. Alumni enjoyed socializing and reminiscing about their days at the university. During the reception, Desert Imaging, a locally owned and operated diagnostic imaging company, gave TTUHSC El Paso a $5,000 gift for scholarships at the Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing. TTUHSC El Paso matched the gift to help establish the Kharisma James Legacy Scholarship Award in honor of Kharisma James, a 2017 graduate of the Hunt School of Nursing who passed away suddenly in 2018.

MAKING A POWERFUL IMPACT
The Sundt Foundation — a nonprofit organization focused on improving the lives of disadvantaged children and adults — donated $5,000 to help support patients’ needs at the Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso Breast Care Center. The gift was presented during a TTUHSC El Paso Friends of the Dental School event that included a hard-hat tour of the university’s new Medical Sciences Building II. Thanks to the Sundt Foundation’s generous gift, funds will be used to provide patient care, educational materials and equipment for the Breast Care Center.

SIP & SIM
At TTUHSC El Paso’s inaugural Sip & Sim event, business leaders and members of the community got an up-close look at the university’s simulation laboratories. Along with hands-on demonstrations, Western Heritage Bank vice chairman Bob Snow and his wife, Jane, pledged a gift of $25,000 to support a scholarship fund for students at the Hunt School of Nursing. TTUHSC El Paso matched the Snows’ gift through the President’s Excellence Fund, making a total of $50,000 available for nursing scholarships.

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STAY UP TO DATE WITH WHAT’S HAPPENING AT TTUHSC EL PASO!
EMAIL YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS TO NEWS.EP@TTUHSC.EDU
We look forward to hearing from you!
In Spring 2019, the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine reached new heights, with a record number of graduates — 18 IN TOTAL — matching to El Paso residency programs.
2013 was a year of firsts for our campus.

That year, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso was established as the TTU System’s fourth university, and the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine and the Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing graduated their first classes.

2013 is also the year that the Foster School of Medicine’s Medical Student Run Clinic opened its doors and began serving the community of Sparks in far East El Paso County.

The creation of the MSRC was a team effort by Foster School of Medicine students, faculty and staff, but its genesis can be traced to alumnus Andrew Billnitzer, M.D., M.P.H., (Medicine ’15).

Enrolled in the Doctor of Medicine/Master of Public Health dual-degree program — a Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center program at the time — Dr. Billnitzer had been brainstorming with his M.P.H. faculty advisor, Theresa Byrd, Dr.P.H., R.N., on ideas for his capstone project.

“I brought up to her how myself and other students would be interested in establishing a free clinic, much like clinics at other medical schools,” said Dr. Billnitzer, who recently completed his neurology residency at Johns Hopkins University and is now a fellow in movement disorders at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.
Dr. Billnitzer realized a student-run clinic could strengthen the school’s educational experience by offering students an opportunity to operate a real-world medical practice. Dr. Byrd also saw the potential of Dr. Billnitzer’s idea and gave a green light to the capstone project.

As word spread, Dr. Billnitzer and his fellow students were pleased to find a number of supporters among the school’s administration and faculty.

One of the first steps was deciding on a location. Dr. Byrd and Jose Manuel de la Rosa, M.D., founding dean of the medical school, had built relationships with “promotoras”—community health workers—from Sparks, a small community with predominantly low-income households and uninsured residents. Dr. de la Rosa said the promotoras had been asking about the possibility of establishing a clinic at the Socorro Ramirez Community Center in Sparks.

With a goal of delivering health care to an underserved El Paso community, Sparks—a colonia with no public transportation lines—seemed like an excellent choice.

“We explored the possibility of other areas in the city. However, after touring the community center in Sparks, we were very impressed with the space,” Dr. Billnitzer said. “We also found the community very excited and supportive of the idea as well.”

Dr. Billnitzer organized a founding student leadership team for the clinic, consisting of himself, Chetna Pande, M.D., M.P.H., (Medicine ’15), Jessica Phillips, M.D., (Medicine ’16) and Victoria Nuñez, M.D., (Medicine ’16).

Also stepping up was Dr. de la Rosa’s executive assistant, Loretta Flores, who assisted with the phone calls, meetings and legal paperwork required to get the clinic up and running. A big believer in the students’ clinic, Flores continues to help out behind the scenes to this day.

TTUHSC President Tedd L. Mitchell, M.D., joined the chorus of support and welcomed the El Paso students for a tour of the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center student-run clinic in Lubbock, Texas. He worked with Dr. de la Rosa to earmark seed money and supplies for an El Paso clinic. Dr. Mitchell currently serves as TTU System chancellor.

Another important piece of the puzzle was finding faculty physicians willing to serve as medical directors, overseeing students at the clinic. The students recruited a founding group of physicians, from the campus and from the community, to share medical director duties, including David Palafox, M.D., Maureen Francis, M.D., Gordon Woods, M.D., Blanca Garcia, M.D., and Maria Theresa Villanos, M.D.

Dr. Woods, like most of the founding group, continues to serve as a medical director. Working with the students has been a reward, he said.

With the pieces in place, the students opened the clinic doors to the Sparks community in October 2013. Dr. Billnitzer remembers worrying no patients would come that first
evening. “Had we advertised enough? Is there something we missed?” he thought.

But that was not the case. When Dr. Billnitzer arrived, there was a long line of patients in the hallway, having shown up early, hoping to be seen. The next few hours were a blur, “running from room to room all night and checking the (patient) flow and checking the clock,” he said.

“I had been so wound up, it was such a feeling of relief and accomplishment after the last patient left,” Dr. Billnitzer recalled. “It was a late night, but everyone had been amazing and professional and shared in the sense of accomplishment. We couldn’t wait to do it again. It was a fantastic feeling.”

Today, the clinic continues to be a success in Sparks, operating twice a month on Tuesday evenings. It is often the only access residents have to health care.

Since opening its doors in 2013, the MSRC has had 2,468 patient encounters. The services provided range from blood pressure, glucose and lipid checks to life-saving screenings including mammograms for breast cancer and Pap tests for cervical cancer.

Every academic year, a new student leadership team is selected for the clinic. The prestigious positions are sought after by students, who undergo a highly competitive selection process.

Dr. Billnitzer said he is ecstatic to see how the student body has rallied around the clinic and expanded its operations.

“They really have drummed up support from the El Paso community through various fundraisers, and I am truly happy that we can continue to provide service to the Sparks community,” he said.

To see how the MSRC is changing lives today, visit bit.ly/tuhscepMSRC.
The Woody L. Hunt School of Dental Medicine is on track to welcome its first class of 40 future dentists in 2021. Check out our timeline of past (and future) milestones in the school’s journey to opening day.

**A HISTORIC ANNOUNCEMENT**
TTUHSC El Paso President Richard Lange, M.D., M.B.A., unveils the university’s plan to establish West Texas’ first-ever dental school. On hand are El Paso businessman Woody L. Hunt and his wife, Gayle Greve Hunt, to announce a $25 million gift from the Hunt Family Foundation to create the Woody L. Hunt School of Dental Medicine.

**TEXAS APPROVES FUNDING**
Gov. Greg Abbott signs a two-year state budget that includes an appropriation of $20 million to establish the school. “This investment and support from the Texas Legislature and governor sends a strong message to our accrediting bodies that the state supports our new school and its critical mission. We cannot thank our local El Paso legislative team enough for their efforts in garnering this appropriation,” said Dr. Black.

**STATE PROGRAM APPROVAL AND NATIONAL ACCREDITATION REVIEW**
The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) approves the school’s Doctor of Dental Medicine degree program during the board’s quarterly meeting in Austin. TTUHSC El Paso officials announce the board’s approval, along with the presentation of a $25,000 gift from El Paso dentist Dennis Care, D.D.S., establishing the Care Family Dean’s Dental School Discretionary Fund. Also in October, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) conducts a two-day site visit as part of the dental education program’s accreditation process.
FILLING THE GAP | TTUHSC EL PASO

SUPPORTING A UNIQUE CURRICULUM
The El Paso community shows its support for the new school as the Paso del Norte Health Foundation announces a $6 million grant to fund a unique curriculum that integrates community health.

BUILDING A LEADERSHIP TEAM
Longtime El Paso dentist Richard C. Black, D.D.S., M.S., is named dean of the school. In September, Wendy Woodall, D.D.S., M.S., joins the faculty as professor and associate dean of academic affairs.

THE FINISH LINE
Activity will ramp up as the school approaches its 2021 opening date. The accreditation process is expected to be complete by early 2020.

The Dental Learning Center in Medical Sciences Building II, where students will train, is expected to open in May 2020, the same month the school’s application cycle opens. The school will conduct interviews and host visits for prospective students beginning in the summer. After selections are made, the first class of 40 students will begin classes in July 2021.

Oral Health Clinic
The Hunt School of Dental Medicine’s clinic will open in July 2021, when the inaugural class of 40 students arrives at TTUHSC El Paso. Students will train at the clinic under the supervision of faculty. The clinic will be located on campus in the current ASB II building and be a destination for low-cost, quality dental care for Borderland residents. The clinic will also serve the university community and their families.

Woody L. Hunt School of Dental Medicine Dean Richard Black, D.D.S., M.S., and Associate Dean Wendy Woodall, D.D.S. (above), participated in the TeamSmile event hosted by the El Paso Chihuahuas baseball team at Southwest University Park in May. Drs. Black and Woodall and other El Paso-area dentists volunteered to provide free dental care for 300 youngsters.
By Leslie Duron, Craig Holden, Leonard Martinez, David Peregrino, Danielle Urbina

In 2009, the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine historically opened its doors to an inaugural class of 40 students. Ten years later, we celebrate the Foster School of Medicine’s strides in medical education and remember those who made the dream of a four-year medical school in El Paso a reality.

A Look Back:
HOW THE FOSTER SCHOOL OF MEDICINE CAME TO BE

A four-year medical school in El Paso had been on the minds of city leaders since the 1970s, when the Texas Tech University School of Medicine in Lubbock opened a regional campus in our city for third- and fourth-year students and resident training.

The campus was well-received, but as El Paso grew, the community realized a four-year medical school could educate more doctors willing to stay in El Paso to care for the medically underserved border community.

The creation of a medical school gained momentum in the late ’80s and early ’90s, as the city realized it needed to create an ecosystem for health care that would bring higher-paying jobs to the community. Other cities of El Paso’s size in Texas were pulling ahead, attracting companies in the biosciences and technology sectors.

Transforming El Paso’s Economy
An economic transformation was necessary. It started with Unite El Paso, a civic group co-founded by Eliot Shapleigh, a community-minded attorney who would later become state senator.
In the early ’90s, Unite El Paso proposed the creation of a “Border Health Institute (BHI)” (today known as the Medical Center of the Americas) — a biosciences research, education and health care center, with the four-year medical school as its cornerstone.

Shapleigh was elected state senator in 1996, running on a promise of establishing the medical school and BHI. During this time, the community and regional consensus building began to bear fruit. In 1999, then-Texas Tech University System Chancellor John T. Montford shared with the Board of Regents his vision for transforming the El Paso campus into a four-year medical school.

The Funding Challenge

A plan in place, the next step was to secure funding. In 1999, Senator Shapleigh fought for a share of the multibillion-dollar settlement of Texas lawsuits against the tobacco industry, and as a result, $25 million of tobacco money established a health research endowment for the El Paso campus. In 2001, El Paso’s legislative delegation secured $40 million to build a campus research facility, known as Medical Sciences Building I, as well as $11 million for a clinic expansion.

A successful 2003 legislative session served as the state’s official approval for the medical school. Private contributions in support of the school were leveraged to help garner state appropriations, and soon after, then-Governor Rick Perry authorized $45 million for the school’s Medical Education Building (MEB). Ground broke on the MEB in 2005, and the campus launched its Infinity Campaign, a community-based fundraising effort, with the goal of raising $25 million over the following two years. The total raised by the Infinity Campaign demonstrated the community’s commitment to a four-year medical school of our own.

The Foster Legacy

As work wrapped up on the MEB in 2007, the year brought more good news for the medical school. The Texas Legislature approved $48 million to fund faculty, and El Paso businessman and philanthropist Paul L. Foster presented a gift of $50 million to establish and fund the medical school. This was, and still is, the largest gift ever received by the TTU System, and the El Paso campus announced the school would be known as the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine. That November, the community celebrated the MEB ribbon cutting.

In July 2009, the Foster School of Medicine opened its doors, welcoming 40 future physicians in the inaugural class of 2013. In the pages of TTUHSC El Paso Alumni & Friends, we celebrate the school’s 10th anniversary by sharing the stories of those who helped make it a reality.
If there were ever a place built on the will and vision of a community, that place would be Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso. In 1999, when then-Texas Tech System Chancellor John T. Montford shared his vision for a full-fledged, four-year medical school in El Paso, the community came together in support of the idea. A four-year medical school would train generations of future physicians and help alleviate the physician shortage while also vastly improving health care in the Paso del Norte region.

Simply put: The creation and establishment of the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine was built on the generosity of others. It began in 2001, when longtime community philanthropists J.O. and Marlene Stewart donated the 10.7 acres of land on which the campus would be built.

In 2002, the Paso del Norte Health Foundation approved a $1.25 million scholarship grant program for local students, contingent on the approval of the four-year medical school. Meanwhile, government leaders, community organizations and local business leaders worked together to make the vision a reality.

With support from the Texas Legislature, and following the signing of House Bill 28 — which authorized $45 million in tuition revenue bonds for the construction of the medical school — ground was broken in 2003 to begin the construction of Medical Sciences Building I.

In the years that followed, the community stepped up in a big way. In 2005, The El Paso Electric Company contributed a gift of $5 million for the new medical school, while other local organizations, including Sierra Providence Health Network and the Rotary Clubs of El Paso, contributed funds to assist with startup costs.

That same year, the Infinity Campaign was created and began its quest to provide even more funds for the four-year medical school. Under this effort, local and regional supporters began a campaign to raise $25 million. The campaign was a success and the $25 million, together with Paul L. Foster’s donation of $50 million to the school, was instrumental in the establishment of what is now the Foster School of Medicine.

Over the past decade, the Foster School of Medicine has become a shining example of the good that comes from a community banded together. A leader in both health care and the education of the next generation of physicians along the U.S.-Mexico border, the Foster School of Medicine wouldn’t be what it is today without the groundswell of support from those who worked together to create a new reality.
The story of TTUHSC El Paso’s Paul L. Foster School of Medicine would not be complete without the man who the school is named after. In 2007, Paul L. Foster’s transformative gift of $50 million helped propel the establishment of the medical school, an effort that would change the course of health care in the Borderland for years to come.

That was more than 10 years ago. Today, the Foster School of Medicine has evolved in ways that benefit not only its students and graduates, but the entire community. Since opening its doors in 2009, the school has educated more than 500 graduates in a program comprised of clinically focused studies, hands-on experience and culturally competent community service.

An El Paso visionary, Foster had already reached significant milestones to further progress in the community before contributing to TTUHSC El Paso. Together with his wife, Alejandra De la Vega Foster, he has become one of El Paso’s biggest community champions thanks to his generosity and investment in the city, the Borderland and future generations of El Pasoans.

“T was looking for something significant that I could make a contribution to that would have a lasting impact on the community,” Foster said. “I decided that helping to get this medical school off the ground and in place would be something that would benefit not only El Paso and Texas but this entire region.”

Foster’s investment in TTUHSC El Paso is truly the gift that keeps on giving. As of 2019, his gift has not only helped fund the establishment of the Foster School of Medicine, but has also provided scholarships for more than 140 medical students known as the Foster Scholars. For many of these students, medical school would not have been possible without the support of a scholarship.

“At the end of the day, students are what it’s all about. So, it was very important to me to make sure that we created a pathway for every student to be able to afford to go to the school,” Foster said.

His hopes for the future? That the Foster School of Medicine continues to grow and educate future generations of doctors from the Borderland and beyond.

“The school of medicine was the first piece of what has now become this amazing university,” Foster said. “I just want it to continue to grow. It already has become a very significant part of the community, but I want it to become a very meaningful and important medical destination for this entire region and I think we’re getting there.”
Achieving the Dream

Jesus Guzman’s journey with the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine began in 2010, before he even knew medical school would be a life-changing part of his story.

In 2010, while working as a theater technician at the Chamizal National Memorial, Guzman witnessed the White Coat Ceremony for the Foster School of Medicine’s incoming class. Guzman, who was born and raised in South Central El Paso, was inspired by the words of the master of ceremonies — it was that moment that ignited something within him, and he was called to serve others. Soon after, he was on his way to medical school as part of the Foster School of Medicine’s Class of 2019.

“I was so inspired by the ceremony and by what the field of medicine meant. I just knew then and there that’s what I wanted to do for the rest of my life,” Guzman said.

Now a resident in TTUHSC El Paso’s Department of Internal Medicine, Guzman is a shining example of how the generosity of others can transform lives and help shape the community for a brighter future. Guzman is a Foster Scholar and attributes his success to scholarship support.

“Now I get to be a resident here and help the community where I grew up,” Guzman said. “My family and I are so blessed. We couldn’t have asked for anything better.”

Community Physicians:

EDUCATING THE FUTURE OF MEDICINE

With a history that stems from the vision of a community, the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine got its start because of those who believed in the benefits that a four-year medical school would bring to the Paso del Norte region. Many of those supporters were longtime El Paso physicians who were members of the El Paso County Medical Society.

“In the effort to establish the school, community physicians were absolutely vital,” said Jose Manuel de la Rosa, M.D., vice president for outreach and community engagement at TTUHSC El Paso. “The role of the El Paso County Medical Society was critical. Community physicians have always been supportive of the Foster School of Medicine.”

It was the political support of the El Paso County Medical Society that sent a powerful message to our local delegation and representatives across the state, said Dr. de la Rosa. Community physicians were advocates in urging the Texas Medical Association to consider the lasting impact a medical school would have on the region.

While our campus was still a part of the Texas...
Tech University School of Medicine regional institution, community physicians welcomed third-and fourth-year students from Lubbock into their El Paso clinics as they completed their educations.

When the Foster School of Medicine opened years later, community physicians became more than just supporters; they provided even more opportunities to help educate students in clinical settings. Over time, their role in medical education has evolved, adhering to the Foster School of Medicine’s curriculum, which focuses heavily on community involvement.

“Community physicians begin to teach medical students from the very first week that they’re enrolled here,” Dr. de la Rosa said.

In their third and fourth years of school, students begin assisting community physicians in their practices and gaining knowledge of patient care in different specialties.

Under the guidance of community physicians, students learn how to interview patients, review medical cases and practice compassionate care—skills that will follow them throughout their careers.

“They’re learning empathy,” Dr. de la Rosa said. “A medical student often can spend an hour with a patient. Even if a faculty member can only spend a few minutes with them, patients still leave absolutely enthralled because they got to spend a lot of time interacting with a future doctor.”

Though known as “community physicians,” doctors who volunteer to mentor and educate students are considered part of the school’s academic community, with ranks based on experience. The Office for Outreach and Community Engagement works with program and clerkship directors to identify different specialties with the most need, including family medicine and emergency medicine.

“It’s not simply an honor, it’s a very rigorous, academically driven faculty appointment,” Dr. de la Rosa said. “Community faculty can be promoted, they can do academic research and they can use our medical library databases.”

The time community physicians spend educating students is volunteer work, but the benefits of mentoring future generations of physicians are worth it.

Thanks to the support and mentorship from community physicians, students at the Foster School of Medicine graduate prepared to work in real-world situations. Some have had research published in academic journals before their careers have fully taken off.

“Being a community physician is fun, it’s refreshing and there’s actually studies that show there’s less burnout in physicians who have teaching duties,” Dr. de la Rosa said. “It’s a rigorous process, but it’s a great service to our community.”

For more information on how to become a community faculty physician, contact the TTUHSC El Paso Office for Outreach and Community Engagement at 915-215-4336 or email john.goeldner@ttuhsc.edu or jmanuel.delarosa@ttuhsc.edu.
As the first four-year medical school along the U.S.-Mexico border, the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine gave school officials a unique opportunity: To create a school that offered one-of-a-kind curriculum and a chance to stand at the forefront of medical education by becoming a leader in culturally competent care and ensuring its students are workforce-ready as soon as they graduate.

In the early years of their educations, in addition to medical skills and scientific principles of medicine, students at the Foster School of Medicine focus on community assessment of the Borderland, while also learning about the community’s needs and disparities when it comes to quality health care.

As they advance, students enter the clinical clerkship portion of the program, where they are exposed to hands-on clinical training and experiences in subspecialties, including family medicine, surgery, internal medicine, pediatrics and more.

Along with their medical courses, the Foster School of Medicine requires all students to learn medical Spanish language skills — one of just a few medical schools in the U.S. with this requirement. This skill enables students to build better communication with diverse populations. The school’s curriculum also features a Clinical Skills/Simulation module where students practice on simulated, high-fidelity manikins to improve their techniques.
decade ago, El Paso was identified as one of the most underserved large cities in the country when it came to health care. For every 100,000 residents, there were only 109 physicians; that was two-thirds less than the national average at the time.

Studies show that doctors tend to establish practices in or near cities where they attended medical school or completed their residencies, which is one of the reasons the community came together to establish the four-year Paul L. Foster School of Medicine in El Paso.

And though El Paso continues to face a shortage of health care providers, progress is being made. Jennifer Perez, M.D., (Medicine ’13) and Erica Alvarez, M.D., (Medicine ’13) are two members of the school of medicine’s first class who returned to El Paso after completing their residencies.

Dr. Perez, a practicing OB/GYN at the Advanced Center for Women’s Health at The Hospitals of Providence, was born and raised in the Sun City and knew she wanted to be a doctor since middle school.

“I feel so privileged to be able to come back to the community where I was trained to care for the women of El Paso,” Dr. Perez said. “I am originally from El Paso, but it wasn’t until I was in medical school that I realized how medically underserved so much of the community is. After seeing that, I knew I wanted to come back to practice here and help fill that need.”

That first class included a program where participating students pledged to return to practice in El Paso.

“I am proud that I was able to honor that pledge and help fulfill the medical school’s mission,” Dr. Perez said.

Dr. Alvarez, an ophthalmologist, is one of only 30 doctors nationwide who specializes in ocular oncology, with the next-nearest specialist 400 miles away in Scottsdale, Arizona. Dr. Alvarez practices at Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso at Transmountain.

Dr. Alvarez first became interested in medicine when she served as a volunteer firefighter in Santa Teresa, New Mexico while in high school. She thought she would go into nursing or emergency medical services until a college adviser suggested she apply to medical school. A while down the road, ophthalmology caught her eye.

“As I started to get into my clinical rotations, I say that ophthalmology stole my heart because it wasn’t something that was on my radar,” Dr. Alvarez said. “But once I had the chance to rotate, there it was as a surgery elective. I knew it was meant to be.”

Dr. Alvarez said it was exciting to be part of the Foster School of Medicine’s inaugural class.

“They were very receptive to a lot of our feedback and a lot of things that we implemented as a class. Our community outreach projects, which were really important to us, are still a part of the medical school,” Dr. Alvarez said. “It’s such a rewarding feeling — we essentially left our footprint.”

TTUHSC El Paso’s mission of keeping its graduates in the area yielded great success this year. The school of medicine’s class of 2019 matched a record 16 students to residency programs in El Paso. With these kinds of numbers, the future is looking bright for health care in the Borderland.
Helping Future Generations

JIM AND JULIE CARDWELL AIM TO EASE NEUROLOGIST SHORTAGE

Jim and Julie Cardwell understand the importance of access to quality health care in a community. This year, in response to a rising shortage of physicians in the Borderland, the Cardwells generously donated $750,000 to Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso in an effort to support future providers who will fill the health care gap.

A longtime El Paso businessman, Jim Cardwell said the gift offers an opportunity to bring TTUHSC El Paso to the forefront in the training of specialty physicians and residents, with the hope of keeping many of them in the region to practice locally.

“We have a serious physician shortage in El Paso and Southern New Mexico,” Jim said. “We need more access to medical providers so that families do not have to leave our region to receive specialty care.”

Thanks to the Cardwells’ gift, which came from the Jim and Julie Cardwell Fund and the Cardwell Family Foundation, TTUHSC El Paso is establishing an endowed chair in the Department of Neurology. The Cardwell Family Foundation is an affiliate of the El Paso Community Foundation.

To further the impact of the Cardwells’ contribution, TTUHSC El Paso matched the gift, creating a $1.5 million fund for the Jim and Julie Cardwell Endowed Chair in Neurology.

Currently, neurology is an area of specialty that is lacking in the El Paso region — with about 20 practicing neurologists, there are too few for a city this size, according to the American Neurological Association. A city should have three to five neurologists for every 100,000 inhabitants — a minimum of 35 if there are 700,000 people in El Paso County.

Patients in need of care for stroke recovery, ALS, epilepsy and other neurological conditions often have to wait months before being seen. Studies show that some of these conditions, including stroke, are more prevalent in Hispanic populations, making the need for quality neurological care even more urgent in El Paso and other predominantly Hispanic communities in West Texas.

For the Cardwells, their transformative gift is all about an investment that improves access to medical care and improves lives in our community.

“The inspiration for this gift was to help the future generations of this region,” Jim said. “This is the building block of many things to come.”

Their contribution will not only provide TTUHSC El Paso with the opportunity to expand its research capacity but also ensure that the highest level of care and most effective treatments are accessible to Borderland patients facing the difficult challenges that come with neurological conditions.

The matching funds leveraged by TTUHSC El Paso reflect the institution’s top priority of reducing the shortage of specialty providers in the community so that families won’t have to travel outside the city for health care services.
Robin Furman grew up understanding the importance of radiology thanks to her father, Arvin Robinson, M.D., a radiologist who retired from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso in 2015.

Seeing the healing power of medicine up close is part of what inspired Robin and her husband, Tony Furman, to give to TTUHSC El Paso’s Department of Radiology.

In June, the two El Pasoans announced a $540,000 gift to establish an endowed chair in honor of Robin’s parents, Dr. Arvin and Beverly Robinson. TTUHSC El Paso matched the gift, and the Robinsons also directed funds to create the $1.5 million Dr. Arvin and Beverly Robinson-Furman Family Endowed Chair in Radiology.

Dr. Robinson, who attended the announcement, joined the university’s radiology department in 2004, part of a remarkable 50-year career in medicine. In addition to launching the department’s residency program, he served as department chair from 2006 to 2013 and is chairman emeritus.

“Concluding his career as chairman of the department and starting a residency program in radiology has made him so proud,” Robin said of her father. “We’re happy that we can now help celebrate that success.”

The endowment will support the new chairman of the radiology department, Thomas M. Dykes, M.D.

“We thought it would be a fitting and lasting tribute to Arvin and Beverly to fund an endowed chair,” Tony said. “It’s something that lasts forever and hopefully inspires other people to consider gifts of a perpetual nature.”

Tony co-founded Interstate Capital, a homegrown company that grew into a $100 million enterprise. The Furmans found success in El Paso and made it their mission to give back to their community. They also volunteer with a number of local nonprofit organizations.

Gifts such as the Furmans’ are incredibly beneficial in helping TTUHSC El Paso achieve its mission of bettering the quality of health care in the Paso del Norte region. Endowed chairs give clinical departments the ability to invest in a transformative vision by supporting fellowships for talented students and residents and funding research activities that will benefit the entire community.

The Department of Radiology’s clinical-based education prepares young radiologists to become culturally competent practitioners. Residents often stay in the cities in which they train, meaning their talent and expertise stays local, reflecting the Furmans’ goal of impacting the community through medical education.

“We hope that this endowment will, first and foremost, help the radiology department and Dr. Thomas Dykes with income to do the things that he and future chairs think are important for advancing the department, the school and, most importantly, the medical students,” Tony said.
Building a Lasting Legacy

A LOVE FOR THE COMMUNITY INSPIRES RICK AND GINGER FRANCIS TO HELP TTUHSC EL PASO REACH NEW HEIGHTS

As the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine celebrates its 10-year anniversary, we look back and see that Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso would not be what it is today without the generous support of many champions, including Rick and Ginger Francis, Texas Tech alumni with a long and meaningful history of leadership and giving in the local community.

Rick and Ginger were among the earliest and most ardent supporters of TTUHSC El Paso before shovels even broke ground on what is now a successful health sciences center serving the Paso del Norte region and West Texas.

An El Paso native, Rick has played a pivotal role in supporting TTUHSC El Paso’s mission of improving the state of health care in the Borderland. While serving on the Texas Tech University System Board of Regents for 17 years, and as chairman of the Board of Regents twice, he was instrumental in advocating for a health sciences center to be established in El Paso.

In 2013, thanks in part to Rick’s work with state legislators and leaders in city government, TTUHSC El Paso became the fourth university of the Texas Tech University System and is now comprised of three separate schools: the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine, the Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing and the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences — with a fourth school, the Woody L. Hunt School of Dental Medicine, to be opened in 2021.

For Rick and Ginger, their support of education and the health care community comes from a love for the Sun City and their alma mater. Texas Tech University is where they met and fell in love and El Paso would be where they raised their children.

“Our love for El Paso and the Borderland region and feel it is important to make a difference on our watch,” Rick and Ginger said. “We’ve had success, and we want to share that success with the community, leaving it a better place for future generations.”

That generous giving continued in June, when TTUHSC El Paso, along with the Paso del Norte Community Foundation and the Francises, announced a $3 million gift that will help drive the university toward a bright future. The gift will have a lasting impact, not only on the TTUHSC El Paso family but on Rick and Ginger themselves, as it was their anniversary gift to one another.
Encouraged by TTUHSC El Paso’s success and driven by their passion to leave the community better for future generations, Rick and Ginger established their family foundation within the Paso del Norte Community Foundation.

Their extraordinarily generous philanthropy will support our university through four endowed deanships, as well as an endowed chair for the TTUHSC El Paso president, named in the Francises’ honor. The gift was matched by TTUHSC El Paso, doubling its impact.

The combined $6 million fund will help continue putting TTUHSC El Paso on the map, as it becomes the only health sciences center in Texas to have all its deanships endowed.

“TTUHSC El Paso has created an institution that will forever impact El Paso with new educational opportunities for future generations,” Rick and Ginger said. “This gift will go toward the next phase of attracting the best and brightest faculty to help propel the university forward.”

"WE LOVE EL PASO AND THE BORDERLAND REGION AND FEEL IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE ON OUR WATCH. WE'VE HAD SUCCESS, AND WE WANT TO SHARE THAT SUCCESS WITH THE COMMUNITY, LEAVING IT A BETTER PLACE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS."

—RICK AND GINGER FRANCIS
Finding Solace

THE TEXAS TECH PHYSICIANS OF EL PASO BREAST CARE CENTER OFFERS HOPE THROUGH ADVANCED CARE

Gloria Ramirez thought the pain in her breast came from moving a box, but from one day to the next, she felt a lump where the pain emanated from. It wasn’t long before Ramirez was diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer that had spread to her lymph nodes.

It’s the kind of news that would devastate most people, but not Ramirez. “I’m a very optimistic person,” Ramirez said. “When I found out I had breast cancer, I said, ‘Okay, so what do we do next?’ Technology is so advanced, medicine is so advanced — let’s get this rolling. Let’s do this.”

The Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso Breast Care Center — accredited by the National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers (NAPBC) — is a one-stop shop for breast cancer care in the Paso del Norte region that has that high level of advanced care Ramirez knew existed. It is one of only two accredited breast care centers in El Paso.

“What we mean by one-stop breast cancer care is that when you come to this facility, you can be seen by a breast surgical oncologist, a medical oncologist, and you have access to other support services here,” said Karinn M. Chambers, M.D., FACS, medical director of TTP El Paso’s Breast Care Center. “We have access to radiation oncology and all the other aspects that are essential to getting complete breast cancer care.”

With an abundance of services available in one location, patients at the center avoid having to travel to receive treatment at different locations from multiple specialists. Additionally, physicians provide exceptional comprehensive care by working together to provide the best possible treatment plan for each patient.

The center has also developed a clinical laboratory program to study the prevention, early detection and treatment of breast cancer. Many things have changed over the past 10 years at the Breast Care Center, including an increased complexity of disease and treatment options. Today, the center sees 200 new patients per year.

Sandra Villagran, assistant director of the Breast Care Center, said the added component of plastic reconstructive surgery is one more milestone for the center.

“Of course, breast cancer diagnosis and treatment aren’t the end of the journey for patients, which is why the Breast Care Center offers a survivorship program. The program covers everything from basic, post-cancer and nutritional care to psychological care that helps address post-treatment anxiety and stress.”

Thanks to the dedicated work of Dr. Chambers and her team at the Breast Care Center, as well as her own courage, Gloria Ramirez has been in remission since April 11.

To learn more about the TTP El Paso Breast Care Center and how Ramirez beat cancer, visit ttuhscep.edu/bcc.

“When I found out I had breast cancer, I said, ‘Okay, so what do we do next?’ Technology is so advanced, medicine is so advanced — let’s get this rolling. Let’s do this.”

—GLORIA RAMIREZ
The Science of Medicine

TTUHSC El Paso’s Four Centers of Emphasis Are Paving the Way for New Biomedical Research in the Paso del Norte Region

In addition to educating the next generation of doctors and nurses, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso is home to the Department of Molecular and Translational Medicine’s four Centers of Emphasis, where the next generation of biomedical researchers are trained. Students from the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences assist faculty members with cutting-edge research focusing on cancer, diabetes and metabolism, infectious diseases and neurosciences. The centers specialize in research on conditions that affect El Paso’s predominantly Hispanic population.

Students who graduate from the biomedical sciences program go on to pursue careers in the fields of medicine, pharmacy, research and physical therapy. Many also go on to medical school.

In the Center of Emphasis in Cancer, led by Director Rajkumar Lakshmanaswamy, Ph.D., state-of-the-art facilities allow for the study of genes and proteins critical to examining cancers with disproportionate impacts on the Hispanic population, including breast, pancreatic and liver cancer.

The center also focuses on cancer prevention and early detection. Research programs directed by Navkiran Shokar, M.D., M.P.H., are supported by the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) and screen individuals in the Paso del Norte region for early signs of colon and breast cancer.

Additionally, through the efforts of Jennifer Salinas, Ph.D., the Center of Emphasis in Cancer has established an innovative, obesity-related cancer prevention program. Dr. Salinas’ program, Pasos Para Prevenir Cancer, is instrumental in leading efforts to help El Pasoans live healthier lifestyles and lessen their risk of developing cancer.

Faculty at the centers also study illnesses — such as diabetes — that also impact the rest of the nation.

In the Center of Emphasis in Diabetes and Metabolism, Director David Cistola, M.D., Ph.D., focuses on early detection of diabetes, so that much of the chronic damage caused by the disease may be prevented. The center has also produced research conducted by Munmun Chattopadhyay, Ph.D., that focuses on early detection of diabetic complications.

Such research, and so much more that comes out of the centers, has widespread benefits for the medical community by assisting health care providers in better understanding the underpinnings of illnesses and developing possible treatments and cures.
IN MEMORIAM

DEVARAJ “DEV” SAMBALINGAM, M.D., passed away in July 2019 in India. Dr. Sambalingam was an assistant professor in the TTUHSC El Paso Department of Pediatrics and provided care for patients in the Laura & Pat Gordon Family Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Level IV at El Paso Children’s Hospital. All who knew Dr. Sambalingam remember him as a devoted husband and father, and a gifted neonatal physician who gave hope and health to so many newborn infants. Dr. Sambalingam is survived by his wife, Dr. Krishnaswamy “Jo” Rao, M.D., and their son, Neil. He will be truly missed by his TTUHSC El Paso family, patients, colleagues, residents and staff.

JOSHUA GAINES, M.D., (Medicine ’13) passed away on July 17, 2014, in Lubbock, Texas, at age 31 after a battle with metastatic colorectal cancer. Dr. Gaines had been accepted into an anesthesiology residency at the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio after graduating from the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine’s inaugural class. Dr. Gaines’ loved ones remember him as a bright and generous individual with the determination to help others through his work as a physician. He chose to donate his body to science to assist researchers in their efforts to learn more about cancer.

IN MEMORIAM

TTUHSC EL PASO | IN MEMORIAM

Because of Kharisma
A 2017 Graduate of the Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing Leaves a Legacy

By any definition, Kharisma James is a hero. When she passed in 2018, James was lauded as a proud veteran, a compassionate nurse and, above all, a dedicated mother who loved her children fiercely — she lost her life while shielding her son, her daughter and another child from an oncoming vehicle in a school parking lot.

Those who knew James know that this act of putting others before herself came naturally, a reflection of the selflessness she embodied not only in her personal life but also in her career. During her time at the Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing, she flourished as a nursing student, as well as a member of the TTUHSC El Paso family, serving as a cabinet member of the Student Government Association. After graduating in 2017, James began her career as an operating room/surgery nurse at The Hospitals of Providence.

To mark National Nurses Week this year, TTUHSC El Paso announced the creation of the Kharisma James Legacy Scholarship Award to honor her memory as a devoted health care provider and upstanding member of the community she loved so much. The award will go toward nursing scholarships at the Hunt School of Nursing, helping to educate future generations of nurses and ease the nursing shortage in West Texas. Since its establishment, James’ family, several classmates and colleagues have contributed to the scholarship fund.

A mother, a nurse, a veteran — all heroes in their own respect. James was all three, and in her absence, we carry on the profound impact she left on TTUHSC El Paso and beyond.
As we celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine, we also celebrate members of the TTUHSC El Paso family who have witnessed the medical school’s growth from the moment its doors opened in 2009. From longtime medical educators to devoted and hardworking staff, they tell us what this momentous occasion means to them.

“In these past 10 years, I have seen the connections that fourth-year medical students make with newer students, seeing them help new students when they begin medical school. The connection is also with us. At this medical school, you have to learn Spanish. The best part about my time here is being able to help students with their Spanish and bonding with the students and seeing them succeed.”

IMELDA IBARRA, Senior Custodian

“I was here when the first class graduated from the Foster School of Medicine. Being an alumnus of TTUHSC in Lubbock, it makes me proud of the Texas Tech University System for putting so many physicians out into the culture that we have here in the Borderland. I’ve watched the class size at the Foster School of Medicine grow from 40 to the 104 it is now. It’s great to know that we’re all in this together.”

HERB JANSSEN, PH.D., M.ED., Professor of Physiology in Medical Education and Interim Associate Dean for Student Affairs

“The Foster School of Medicine has grown at a fast pace. I think its continuing growth will help close the gap of the physician shortage and improve health care in our community. I remember attending the White Coat Ceremony for the first class of medical students – it was exhilarating! All of us that work at TTUHSC El Paso have, in some way, contributed to changes that have happened in the past 10 years, and it feels good to be a part of it.”

MARIA THERESA VILLANOS, M.D., FAAP, Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics

“In the past 10 years, we have educated outstanding doctors who are now practicing in our community, region and other parts of the country. We are now celebrating the Foster School of Medicine’s 10-year anniversary, but I believe that if we work together and strive to achieve the mission of our institution, the sky is the limit for its growth, and we are here to stay for a very long time.”

KARINA ESCAPITA, Associate Managing Director for Application Development
Without scholarship support, my dream to serve our community of El Paso as a physician would not have been possible.

Invest in student scholarships today!

JESUS GUZMAN, M.D.
BOWIE HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNUS • FSOM CLASS OF 2019

ttuhscep.edu/foster10