EVERYDAY HEROES
At the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic, health care professionals put their lives on the line while a community of supporters stand behind them.

BORDER HEALTH: MEETING THE CHALLENGE
With the growth of Hispanic populations in the U.S., TTUHSC El Paso addresses the unique health care challenges they face.

A DIVERSE BODY OF RESEARCH
TTUHSC El Paso researchers seek improved treatments for diseases prevalent in the Borderland.

MARKING OUR MILESTONE
Fun was had, funds were raised and memories were made at the Foster School of Medicine's 10-Year Anniversary Celebration.

ON THE COVER:
Thanks to Creative Kids Inc., a local nonprofit, the cover art on the Summer 2020 edition of TTUHSC El Paso Alumni & Friends is an homage to health care and the diverse, cultural environment that surrounds us.

"Strength and Fortitude" by Jenny, a 16-year old participant in Creative Kids’ Project ABLE, is a mixed media piece combining her love of family, culture and aspirations of becoming a nurse. The hands represent strength and fortitude, and the heart represents Jenny's dedication to serve her purpose of saving lives in the future.
Overcoming Challenges Together

In February, I joined our Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso family and community supporters at “A Red Tie Affair For A White Coat Occasion,” the Foster School of Medicine’s 10-year anniversary event. That night we heard inspiring testimonials on how our health sciences center has transformed the lives of so many in our community. I’m proud to be the president of our university and grateful for the work we do to educate the next generation of compassionate, culturally sensitive and community-minded health care professionals.

It goes without saying that the first half of 2020 hasn’t been easy. We’ve faced many challenges, including our nation’s reckoning with social injustice.

Since our university’s beginnings, we’ve prioritized a safe and inclusive environment for students of every background, heritage, religion, creed and color. The vibrant culture that surrounds us and our diverse student body breathe life into the TTUHSC El Paso community and make our students better health care professionals.

The death of George Floyd, and too many others, reminds us that much remains to be done to evoke change and equity across our country. Being an inclusive environment is no longer enough, and I believe we can and must do better. We must follow intention with real change, and I’m confident our university will welcome that challenge openly and honestly.

This year has also presented our community with a life-altering pandemic. In March, COVID-19 reached our city, and it changed the way we work, teach and learn.

To say our TTUHSC El Paso family has worked hard to address the pandemic in El Paso would be an understatement. Thanks to you, we’re ready for the “new normal” of the upcoming academic year.

The virus outbreak sheds light on the unique health care challenges we face as a border city. With our faculty leading the way, students and residents have experienced a distinctive component to their education that will leave a lasting impact. In addition to learning how to care for patients during a pandemic, they have learned how to advocate for their patients, easing their fears and fulfilling the commitment they made to themselves, the profession and community when they donned white coats for the first time.

Now, more than ever, we have seen how health transcends borders. The Summer 2020 edition of TTUHSC El Paso Alumni & Friends is a tribute to health care heroes in the Borderland and an informative look at how our students, faculty and staff dedicate their talents to the community. Whether providing care to vulnerable populations, participating in border health curriculum or researching the area’s most prevalent diseases, our TTUHSC El Paso community works together to contribute to a better understanding of border health, locally and nationwide.

Our lives have changed significantly in the past months, and the impact of the pandemic has challenged El Paso in several ways; however, there are many things that have not changed – our willingness to help others in times of need, our commitment to protecting health care professionals and others on the front lines, and the sunny disposition our city is known for.

I’m confident that these events, though difficult, will positively shape our students into outstanding health care leaders of the future. We will see brighter days ahead, and we will always remain El Paso Strong.

Richard Lange, M.D., M.B.A.
Rick and Ginger Francis
Endowed President
What started as a faraway concern in the early months of 2020 soon became a reality – first in coastal states in the United States, then eventually in Texas and El Paso as the COVID-19 virus continued its deadly march. Like the rest of the world, people in our city began to shelter at home, and students no longer stepped into classrooms. We stayed in touch virtually and our trips outside were reduced to essentials. "Essential" became a word we associated with the crisis – it describes those who stand on the front lines, including health care professionals, first responders, grocery store workers and so many more who keep our city running.

As our daily, stay-at-home rituals became the new normal, students and faculty at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso learned and taught virtually. Nursing students stood toe-to-toe with the virus as they treated patients during clinical rotations, and medical students offered their time and skills to assist the El Paso Department of Public Health with contact tracing.

Traditional events, like Match Day and commencement, were held online. Graduating students saw their names and photos on computer screens as their families applauded and shared their excitement virtually. It’s a moment in our university’s history we will never forget.

At TTUHSC El Paso, we often say we’re training the next generation of health care professionals. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us not only that we need this
At the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic, health professionals put their lives on the line every day, supporting the community, especially in a time of great need. "I've acknowledged the fact that in my career, I'll potentially be exposed to several pathogens; nonetheless, I stand ready to serve my community and patients in any way I can," she said.

As the number of COVID-19 cases climbed in the Sun City, health care professionals faced the harsh reality that they could unintentionally expose and infect their loved ones. Many sacrificed time with their children and families by isolating in local hotels following long shifts in hospitals and clinics.

In April, TTUHSC El Paso partnered with Esperanto Developments, a local hotel management company, to provide free hotel rooms where nursing students could safely rest and isolate after completing clinical rotations. For students like Jenny Moya, this act of kindness goes far beyond the duration of the pandemic – her ability to continue serving the community meant she would stay on track with her degree program while protecting her loved ones.

“It gave me peace of mind that I was keeping my family safe while doing what I'm passionate about, which is caring for others. This allowed me to continue my journey as a nursing student and push forward to the summer semester," Moya said.

That resounding commitment to their education and future careers became a defining moment for the Hunt School of Nursing, and Woods said student response to the pandemic, and all its unexpected changes, was overwhelmingly positive.

“When you ask students why they want to be a nurse, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us not only that we need this next generation, but that their dedication, passion and willingness to step up – no matter what – is how the world, and the Borderland, will demonstrate resilience during challenging times.

**Uncharted Territory**

For the second time in less than a year, local nurses and nursing students found themselves on the front lines during a critical moment in El Paso’s history.

On Aug. 3, 2019, many worked tirelessly following a mass shooting at an El Paso Walmart. A few months after, as COVID-19 began to sweep across the nation and into the El Paso area, nurses all around the city – dressed head-to-toe in the best personal protective equipment (PPE) they could get – faced an uphill battle.

“In a pandemic, you’re attacking an enemy that could approach you from any angle,” said Stephanie Woods, Ph.D., R.N., dean of the Hunt School of Nursing at TTUHSC El Paso.

“Nurses and nursing students were learning on the job, trying to figure out how to protect themselves and others. They did what they always do, which is a little bit like acting as a traffic cop – you're looking in four directions at once and trying to decide how to keep the flow going.”

In March, following a week-long spring break, students from the Hunt School of Nursing continued their education via remote online learning. The challenge, Woods said, was getting students into their clinical rotations.

“The faculty and I worked diligently to keep students in clinical experiences,” she said. “That opportunity changed minute by minute; but what better time for us to help them grow and learn than during a global pandemic?”

Heather Scarbrough, a student at the Hunt School of Nursing, worked in the Labor and Delivery department of a local hospital, which provided a unique experience as hospital policies changed throughout the pandemic.

“As a student nurse, I was able to spend quality time with my laboring patients and support them in ways a busy labor nurse isn’t always able to provide,” Scarbrough said. “We had a strict no-visitor policy, so some of those moms-to-be were missing loved ones during a pivotal moment in their lives. I tried to fill that void for them the best I could, all while knowing I could’ve contracted COVID-19.”

Like her peers, Scarbrough's focus remained on the next generation, but that their dedication, passion and willingness to step up – no matter what – is how the world, and the Borderland, will demonstrate resilience during challenging times.
most of them will tell you that it’s because they want to help people,” Woods said. “I’m just so proud of them.”

Joining Forces
TTUHSC El Paso was built on a foundation of philanthropy – it’s this part of our university’s identity that has always kept us tied to the local community. While our students and faculty work year-round with the men, women and children of the Borderland, TTUHSC El Paso supporters generously give to keep our mission alive. Even in times of hardship, local businesses and organizations continued to give throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, turning the tables and making sure our health care heroes were the ones being cared for.

As reports of PPE shortages across the nation made headlines, students, employees and organizations jumped into action by using available resources to ensure physicians and nurses in our Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso clinics and partner hospitals had what they needed to safely do their jobs.

In a show of support for the Red Raider family, the Texas Tech University College of Architecture in El Paso used 3D printing technology to create and donate 500 face shields to help protect those on the front lines.

Together with her husband, Carola La-Follette, a member of the TTUHSC El Paso family, 3D-printed head bands used to hold face shields and donated them to TTP El Paso health care professionals.

To keep health care professionals energized and fed, several organizations in the region stepped forward by providing free meals, coffee and sweet treats to boost morale.

Chick-fil-A North Hills and Hope City Community Church came together to provide lunch for employees at the TTP El Paso Alberta and Transmountain clinics as they continued working to provide patient care.

“We just want everybody to feel loved and appreciated,” said Christy Ramirez, Chick-fil-A community marketing director. “Those health care workers who are out there screening – they’re sacrificing so much just by being there and we wanted to give back in just a small way to show them that we care.”

In May, El Paso Locomotive FC – along with their mascot, Ozzy the bat – helped provide even more Chick-fil-A meals to TTP El Paso clinics. Together with Chick-fil-A North Hills and Chick-fil-A Cielo Vista Mall, the soccer team visited with our sports medicine physicians and orthopaedic surgeons while delivering lunch.

To provide physicians and nurses with a cup of coffee, nonprofit organization InfraGard supplied TTP El Paso clinics with 21 large canisters of coffee and coffee creamer. And what better than a delicious cookie to accompany a cup of coffee; Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest donated cookies to TTUHSC El Paso and our friends at University Medical Center of El Paso and El Paso Children’s Hospital.

Due to shelter-in-place orders, the Girl Scouts’ council was left with 72,000 boxes of cookies, which were purchased by supporters and donated directly back for
distribution to military, hospitals, fire stations, police stations, EMTs and senior centers.

With help from TTUHSC El Paso’s President’s Development Council member and President of National Restaurant Supply Bruce Gulbas, his wife Jackie, and TTUHSC El Paso Vice President of Institutional Advancement Andrea Tawney, Ph.D., 3,600 boxes of cookies were delivered to deserving health care professionals and the Texas Tech Police Department.

Support for the Unexpected

Undoubtedly, the impact of COVID-19 reached far beyond overwhelmed hospital systems. At home and in their personal lives, students began to feel the financial burden that came along with economic consequences of the pandemic.

Many TTUHSC El Paso students rely heavily on service industry jobs to augment their income as they complete their degree programs. As restaurants and other businesses in the city temporarily closed their doors, students were left questioning how they would pay for rent, groceries and daily necessities.

In April, the Wells Fargo Foundation gifted TTUHSC El Paso with a generous grant in support of students from the Hunt School of Nursing as they faced unforeseen challenges and expenses due to the pandemic. TTUHSC El Paso leveraged the funds to assist nursing students through partnerships.

Due to shelter-in-place orders, the Girl Scouts’ council was left with 72,000 boxes of cookies, which were purchased by supporters and donated directly back for distribution to military, hospitals, fire stations, police stations, EMTs and senior centers.
with Project ARRIBA and Workforce Solutions Borderplex.

To further ease financial hardship due to COVID-19, TTUHSC El Paso created the Student Frontline Emergency Fund, which provides relief for current and future needs of students who served, and are still serving, in local hospitals during clinical rotations.

Upon learning of student hardship, community partners – including AT&T, GECU, El Paso Electric, JPMorgan Chase, BBVA and the Albertsons Companies Foundation – came to their aid by making generous contributions to the emergency fund.

These contributions, which extend a lifeline to vulnerable students, not only provide funds for rent, mortgage, medical and educational expenses, but ensure students graduate on time and enter the workforce where they are needed now more than ever.

As the need for food items among students increased, local businesses and members of the community stepped up and donated to the TTUHSC El Paso RaiderAid Food Pantry.

Fellow essential workers at both Food City Supermarkets and Vista Markets donated nonperishable goods and other staples to the student pantry. Additionally, Paul and Suzanne Dipp, owners of Economy Cash & Carry, and Stephen Peterson, owner of 3Pete Logistics, LLC, gifted the pantry with generous contributions.
Health Care Heroes

For nurses and physicians, serving on the front lines is just another part of their everyday lives. From the moment they begin their journey in health care, their commitments are focused on healing, no matter the situation.

“I’ve always thought it was a beautiful hero or heroine story to talk about health care in the time of crisis,” Woods said. “Health care professionals go about their business as usual, taking care of patients while minimizing thoughts of themselves. If these noble people are going to go in and take care of these patients, it’s up to us to do everything in our power to keep them protected.”

COVID-19 and the impact it’s had around the world has changed our lives in ways we never expected. At the forefront of uncertainty, health care professionals continued going to work, saving lives and standing bedside to ease fears, making patients feel less alone. It’s said that not all heroes wear capes – at TTUHSC El Paso, our heroes wear scrubs.

As New York became the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, Heath Bailey, a 2018 graduate of the Hunt School of Nursing, joined nurses across the country who left home to help save the lives of countless individuals admitted to the state’s hospitals.

Bailey, who lives in El Paso, spent this past spring working at NYU Winthrop Hospital in Long Island, New York. For eight weeks, he worked strictly with COVID-19 patients, many of whom have underlying health conditions such as diabetes and cancer.

“The schooling and training I received at the Hunt School of Nursing was crucial to me being here helping with the COVID-19 pandemic,” Bailey said. “The discipline and rigorous training that I received from my professors is what has kept me going. They taught me that in a time of need you have to step up and help out. This is what leadership is all about – being able to work the front lines and not looking back.”

To read Bailey’s full story, visit ttuhscep.edu/magazine.
Thank You
Health Care Heroes!
Medventure For Your Future

In January, more than 600 middle schoolers throughout El Paso learned about careers in the health sciences at the ninth annual Medventure For Your Future fair at TTUHSC El Paso. The free event, sponsored by Wells Fargo, was organized by the Office of Admissions’ Outreach Programs. TTUHSC El Paso students and faculty presented fun activities and hands-on science workshops.

MLK Day Of Service

For Martin Luther King Jr. Day, TTUHSC El Paso celebrated the life and legacy of the civil rights leader with volunteer efforts aimed at improving the El Paso community. More than 130 students from all three TTUHSC El Paso schools organized community service events throughout El Paso County over the holiday weekend, including health and dental screenings in underserved communities.

Love Your Colon

In March, TTUHSC El Paso, in partnership with the Southwest Coalition for Colon Cancer Screening (SuCCCeS), hosted the “Love Your Colon” health fair at The Fountains at Farah open-air mall. Attendees participated in free health screenings provided by Hunt School of Nursing students and tours of a giant, inflatable colon. The health fair was part of TTUHSC El Paso’s continued efforts to spread awareness of prevention of colorectal and other gastrointestinal cancers.

All events mentioned were held prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in El Paso and before the issued “Stay Home, Work Safe” order from the City of El Paso.
Strong Ties
A love of nursing and the Borderland drive Margie and Ed Escudero to support student scholarships

In January, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso announced a gift from El Pasoans Ed and Margie Escudero in support of scholarships for students of the Hunt School of Nursing. TTUHSC El Paso matched the gift to double the impact of their generous, long-term investment – scholarships for Hunt School of Nursing students are vital in ensuring they graduate on time and enter the workforce soon after completing their programs.

The Escuderos have meaningful ties to the university and the El Paso community. Margie Escudero is a proud TTUHSC nursing alumna and a member of the TTUHSC El Paso President’s Development Council. Ed Escudero is the president and CEO of High Desert Capital LLC, and serves on the boards of several local businesses and nonprofit organizations.

Changing Lives Across West Texas
A generous grant from CPRIT increases access to HPV vaccinations

In 2019, the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) awarded a $1.9 million grant to TTUHSC El Paso in support of a cancer prevention program led by two university faculty members. The prevention grant will go toward Tiempo de Vacunarte 2, which focuses on cancers caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). The program is directed by co-principal investigators Jennifer Molokwu, M.D., M.P.H., and Jessica Calderón-Mora, Dr.P.H.

"The goal of Tiempo de Vacunarte 2 is to reduce the burden of HPV-associated cancers, particularly cervical cancer, in border and rural counties by providing no-cost vaccines."

Giving Back to the Borderland
A member of the Red Raider family pledges support for the next generation of hometown health care professionals

Carlos O. Viesca, M.D., attending pain medicine specialist at Providence Pain Associates, knows the importance of helping those in the border community. Dr. Viesca grew up in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, where he also attended medical school, and completed residency and fellowship programs at both TTUHSC (Lubbock) and TTUHSC El Paso.

During the Foster School of Medicine’s 10-year anniversary fundraising event, “A Red Tie Affair for A White Coat Occasion,” the Border Medical Student Scholarship Endowment was created when Dr. Viesca and his wife, Rocio Viesca, pledged $40,000 to assist students from the El Paso area. Richard Lange, M.D., M.B.A., president of TTUHSC El Paso, and his wife, Bobette Lange, pledged an additional $10,000.

The Border Medical Student Scholarship Endowment will give talented students from the Borderland an opportunity to attend medical school locally.
Generous gifts drive opportunity and innovation at TTUHSC El Paso
Without community support, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso would not be the pillar of health care it is today. Continued support from those who believe in our mission allows our students, researchers and physicians to engage in innovative programs that provide high-quality health care, in a variety of areas, to our local community.

Over the past year, philanthropic gifts from several donors positively impacted TTUHSC El Paso initiatives aimed at addressing gastrointestinal disorders and mental health care – both of which affect people of all ages in our region.

The center has a life-changing impact on its patients based on the scope and scale of diagnostic tests and therapies, as well as its globally recognized research in GI motility.

In November 2019, Graham Bell, M.D., donated $50,000 to establish the Graham Bell GI Motility Fund for Excellence to benefit TTUHSC El Paso’s Center for Neurogastroenterology and Gastrointestinal (GI) Motility.

Dr. Bell, a San Francisco real estate developer and entrepreneur, has known center director Richard McCallum, M.D., since the two were teenagers in Brisbane, Australia. After graduating from medical school in Australia, Drs. Bell and McCallum completed postgraduate training in the U.S. The two have remained close friends for decades.

In addition to his role as director of the center, Dr. McCallum is professor and head of gastroenterology research, and founding chair of the Department of Internal Medicine at TTUHSC El Paso.

The center has a life-changing impact on its patients based on the scope of diagnostic tests and therapies, as well as its globally recognized research in GI motility. GI motility refers to the relationship of nerves and muscles that create movement within the digestive system – disorders associated with GI motility can cause debilitating pain for those who suffer from them.

One example is gastroparesis, a rare but serious GI disorder that prevents or delays the stomach from emptying food. Gastroparesis often affects people with diabetes, which means it has a particular impact in El Paso County, where up to 20% of adults have been diagnosed with diabetes.

“It’s exciting to be able to contribute to something that will make a difference in the lives of patients,” Dr. Bell said.

Gastroparesis is the focus of another study supported by a recent grant to the university. For reasons not well understood, gastroparesis affects women more than men. To better understand the physiological processes associated with the disorder, Munmun Chattopadhyay, Ph.D., with help from the Edward N. and Margaret G. Marsh Foundation, has launched a research project titled “Gastroparesis: A Mysterious Stomach Disorder and its Prevalence in Women.”

In 2019, Dr. Chattopadhyay, an assistant professor in the Foster School of Medicine’s Department of Molecular and Translational Medicine, received $100,429 from the Marsh Foundation to fund her research.

“My study will help compile new and significant data on how this disorder affects people with diabetes, and why it’s more prevalent in women compared to men,” Dr. Chattopadhyay said.
Her study will analyze tissue samples collected from gastroparetic and nongastroparetic patients, and identify molecular markers that could be used to improve treatment for the disorder.

The Marsh Foundation, which primarily supports El Paso-based organizations, provides funding for a variety of charitable, scientific, literary and educational purposes, with special attention to medical research.

Grants from the Marsh Foundation, such as the one supporting Dr. Chattopadhyay’s research, have made a significant difference in the lives of many, including El Pasoan Desirae Manzanares.

After a few months of mysterious weight loss and doctors not being able to figure out why she couldn’t keep food down, Manzanares was diagnosed with gastroparesis. She sought treatment at TTUHSC El Paso as her “last hope.” Manzanares participated in a clinical trial of a medicine to treat gastroparesis. The medication worked, and she was able to return to a normal diet and renewed quality of life. “I came in feeling a bit hopeless on finding answers,” Manzanares said. “I left feeling like I had an advocate and restored hope.”

Representatives of the Paso del Norte Health Foundation, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute and TTUHSC El Paso are working together to provide increased mental health care services to the region’s youth.
In January, thanks to a generous $500,000 gift from the J. Edward and Helen M.C. Stern Foundation, TTUHSC El Paso established an endowed professorship in the Department of Psychiatry. The university matched the gift, for a total fund of $1 million. The professorship will help improve and grow mental health resources available to the community. The gift also will assist with the recruitment of faculty researchers, residents and students.

The Stern Foundation was established in 1993 by the late J. Edward Stern, M.D., and his wife, Helen M.C. Stern, Ph.D., who devoted their lives to improving health care in El Paso and making mental health care more accessible. Dr. J. Edward Stern was one of the founding practitioners at El Paso’s Providence Memorial Hospital and was one of a group of physicians who lobbied for the first mental hospital in El Paso. He pioneered the early establishment and practice of neurology, psychiatry and internal medicine in El Paso.

Dr. Helen M.C. Stern also led a long and rewarding career as a clinical psychologist and was considered a leader in the diagnosis and treatment of schizophrenia. She worked as a clinical psychologist with the U.S. Army and Veterans Administration and later established a thriving clinical practice in El Paso.

The Sterns’ legacy continues to touch lives today through the Stern Foundation.

In another initiative to improve mental health care across the region, the Department of Psychiatry has teamed up with the Paso del Norte Health Foundation and the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute to launch the regional Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN) and Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHATT) programs at TTUHSC El Paso.

CPAN and TCHATT were established by the Texas Legislature through Senate Bill 11. These programs, part of a statewide network, will support pediatric and family primary care outreach and engagement across large parts of West Texas.

TTUHSC El Paso used grant funds from PDNHF to engage the Meadows Institute for technical assistance in developing the regional CPAN and TCHATT programs.

TCHATT comprises telehealth programs for identifying and assessing behavioral health needs and providing access to mental health services for children and youth.

CPAN, a statewide network of child psychiatry access centers, provides consultation services and training opportunities for pediatricians and primary care providers. CPAN aims to be a one-stop resource for child and youth mental and behavioral health care to provide coordinated early intervention.

The Department of Psychiatry at TTUHSC El Paso will develop the consults and training to make these programs available through telehealth systems.

Early intervention for psychiatric and behavioral health disorders can improve the quality of a child’s home and family life.
Hispanics and the Future of Texas

Border health is particularly salient for Texas, where Hispanics are predicted to become the state’s largest population group before 2022, according to the state demographer. As a group, Hispanics face a number of troubling chronic health issues, including obesity and high blood pressure. Hispanics are also more likely to die from diabetes and chronic liver disease than non-Hispanic whites.

In El Paso, obesity remains a growing and troubling trend, as the condition often leads to a cascade of health problems, including Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and certain cancers. The percentage of obese adult El Paso residents grew from 23% in 2004 to 29% in 2016, according to the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program. Lifestyle plays a major role in these chronic diseases, hence the need for TTUHSC El Paso’s health education and outreach programs.
“Border health is particularly salient for Texas, where Hispanics are predicted to become the state’s largest population group before 2022, according to the state demographer.”
**Pandemic Exposes Racial/Ethnic Disparities**

As COVID-19 surges through the U.S., researchers are beginning to comb through race and ethnicity data connected to the disease. Their findings show that communities of color suffer disproportionately from the virus. Health issues such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease are factors behind the disparity, but so are the social realities of Hispanic, Black and Native American communities. These groups are more likely to work essential jobs that put them at high risk for viral exposure. They’re also more likely to come home to multi-generational households and spread the virus to vulnerable family members.

COVID-19 has further laid bare racial and ethnic health disparities, and the disease threatens to turn back the public health progress we’ve made in our border communities. The faculty, students and public health workers of our health sciences center are needed more than ever. We invite you to read on to learn more about how TTUHSC El Paso is meeting the border health challenge.

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**BORDER HEALTH DISPARITIES: ACCESS TO CARE**

**Physician Numbers Improving but Still Lag**

In El Paso County, thanks in part to the community’s investment in TTUHSC El Paso, the ratio of physicians to residents has improved. In 2010, there was one primary care physician per 2,309 residents; by 2017 that number was one per 2,075 residents.

But we still have a long way to go compared to Texas’ and the U.S.’s physician/resident ratios: Texas has one physician for every 1,642 residents; the U.S. has one per 1,325.

Source: www.countyhealthrankings.org

**Texas Border: In Need of a Doctor’s Care**

In a 2018 survey, 57% of residents of Texas’ border counties said they have at least one personal doctor, compared to 74% of non-border Texas residents.

In the same survey, 70% of border residents said they’ve had a routine checkup in the past year, compared to 76% of non-border residents.

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

**Dentists in the Pipeline**

Access to oral health care is another critical issue along the border, which is why El Paso was able to make the case – and find the support – to establish the Hunt School of Dental Medicine at TTUHSC El Paso.

El Paso has one dentist for every 2,075 residents, compared to a Texas average of one per 1,642 residents, and a U.S. average of one per 1,325 residents.

Source: www.countyhealthrankings.org
TTUHSC El Paso Care Van brings health care and health education to underserved communities

A challenging – but very real – aspect of life on the U.S.-Mexico border is the existence of colonias, neighborhoods outside city limits that lack basic infrastructure due to socioeconomic factors. In El Paso County, and across the southern border of Texas and Southern New Mexico, thousands live in colonias, and many go without basic public transportation, adequate health care, and in some cases, necessities like electricity and running water.

Thanks to the Foster School of Medicine’s Medical Student Run Clinic (MSRC), and other initiatives led by faculty and students at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso, residents from colonias in El Paso County can be seen by a health care professional and screened for diseases like breast cancer and cervical cancer. It’s often the only health care they receive because of a lack of insurance, transportation or money needed to see physicians in the city.

In fall 2019, TTUHSC El Paso was given even more means of providing preventive and primary care to underserved communities thanks to the gift of a mobile health unit. The Caring for Children Foundation of Texas, sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas, generously donated the full-time, exclusive use of a Care Van, which is being used by the MSRC and several departments within TTUHSC El Paso. The Hunt School of Dental Medicine’s future clinic also plans to use the van to bring dental care to colonia residents.

Mobile clinic services include early childhood vaccinations in partnership with Immunize El Paso; blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol screenings; January kicked off the first stop in Agua Dulce. Agua Dulce is a low-income, rural area in Far East El Paso, and many of its residents are uninsured. The van also made a stop in two areas of Southwest Texas, Alpine and Van Horn, to provide services associated with TTUHSC El Paso’s epilepsy outreach clinic, led by the Department of Neurology.

While promoting the university’s mission of improving the lives of people in our own community, the Care Van also allows TTUHSC El Paso to focus on the unique health care needs of border and rural populations well beyond El Paso.
As a Texas border city, El Paso has been at the forefront of a humanitarian crisis that began in 2018. Though border migration has long been an aspect of life in the Paso del Norte region, all eyes were on Southwest Texas as the number of U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions rose dramatically throughout 2018 and 2019.

Seeking asylum, and fleeing extreme poverty and violence, immigrants from countries including Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala arrived in the United States in droves with hopes of finding safety and refuge.

In 2019, the U.S. Border Patrol reported 851,508 apprehensions – an eye-opening climb from the 396,579 apprehensions reported in 2018. Following processing, U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement released many of these asylum-seekers to nonprofit, volunteer-run shelters throughout El Paso. Their journey from one country to another, however, meant that health care services were critical, especially for children.

With nowhere else to turn, the immigrants relied on services provided by volunteer physicians, both in El Paso and from across the country.

Blanca Garcia, M.D., a Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso pediatrician and assistant professor in TTUHSC El Paso’s Department of Pediatrics, is among several physicians who have volunteered regularly since the end of 2018. Dr. Garcia works primarily with hospitality centers run by Annunciation House, a local nonprofit that houses asylum-seekers.

She remembers the first time she volunteered to help children in the shelters.

“One Friday night in October 2018, I received a text about a group of approximately 80 migrants, which included many families with small children, who had been released in front of the Greyhound station downtown,” Dr. Garcia said. “The group was organized by local police to walk approximately a mile to a nearby parochial center, which was being transformed into an emergency shelter. There were sick kids in the group, and the call came for anyone available to come see them.

“Many TTP El Paso pediatricians and pediatric residents came in that day and spent the evening triaging and treating the sick children. I was one of them, and I have been volunteering and helping to organize medical volunteers for this cause ever since.”

Dr. Garcia said she and fellow volunteer physicians mostly treat common childhood illnesses, including acute gastroenteritis – characterized by diarrhea and vomiting – as well as colds and other viral illnesses.

In 2019, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security implemented the Migrant Protection Protocols, which sharply reduced the number of asylum-seekers released to local shelters. The protocols require asylum-seekers to remain in Mexico while they await immigration hearings in the U.S.

Since then, Dr. Garcia and other volunteer physicians are called in on an as-needed basis – but it doesn’t change the important, behind-the-scenes work of physicians who see no borders when it comes to health care.

“Many of the children we see have endured tremendous physical and psychological stressors. Difficult travel histories, poor nutritional status, environmental exposures and toxic stress make them high risk for complication from common childhood conditions,” Dr. Garcia said. “Not only do these families have limited resources, but they are also limited by fear.”

Though they are just one stop in their patients’ journeys to better lives, volunteer physicians like Dr. Garcia and the faculty at TTUHSC El Paso are a reflection of selflessness and compassion, lending helping hands to all in the community that surrounds them.
Future physicians at the Foster School of Medicine not only learn medical Spanish as a requirement, but are offered electives geared specifically toward becoming a doctor in border communities.

During their Family Medicine course, fourth-year students at the Foster School of Medicine can take the Border Health Spanish Immersion elective, which provides the opportunity to work with residents in Presidio, Texas, while improving their Spanish skills. Additionally, students engage with the border community while understanding challenges faced by patients and providers regarding access to primary care.

Opportunities to learn more about border health are also extended to TTUHSC El Paso residents. The Department of Pediatrics has implemented a border health curriculum for all pediatric residents, especially those interested in better understanding underserved Hispanic populations on the border.

In the beginning, Norbert Donias, M.D., a first-year pediatric resident at TTUHSC El Paso, thought the course was just about helping people in the community who didn’t have access to health care resources.

“What I experienced was more eye-opening than that,” Dr. Donias said. “I saw how scared these populations can be, not having access to health care – how they live in constant fear. I saw that many don’t know what their resources are and it affects them greatly.”

Dr. Donias said the experience has affected how he will interact with patients in the future. For him, it’s not just about providing health care, but learning about the daily lives of those in underserved communities and how a lack of resources could be affecting their health.

According to Lisa Ayoub-Rodriguez, M.D., assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics, part of the curriculum in Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 included visiting several sites throughout El Paso, including the Annunciation House migrant hospitality centers, the El Paso Federal Immigration Court, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Residents also visited with local immigration attorneys and several other community experts.

During the elective course, residents worked with community partners, including Project Vida, to provide supervised medical care in El Paso colonias. The goal of the elective is to build a strong foundation of understanding of the border population, which will allow physicians to become advocates for the underserved.

Dr. Ayoub-Rodriguez’s goal is to make the course available to residents in other departments in the future, expanding their knowledge of border communities, and border medicine, even further.

No matter where TTUHSC El Paso residents resume their careers, the university’s mission of training compassionate, culturally competent doctors prepares them to care for diverse communities both on the border and across the United States.
Despite obstacles presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hunt School of Dental Medicine remains on track to welcome its first class of 40 students to the TTUHSC El Paso campus in July 2021.

Cyd Goldfarb, senior director of admissions and recruitment for the school, said it hasn’t been difficult for her to shift from in-person to virtual meetings with prospective students. Like many TTUHSC El Paso employees, she began working from home in March, when the university closed its campus as a safety precaution.

However, timing was on her side. Before universities across Texas began restricting visitors, she spent weeks crisscrossing the state speaking to prospective students at their universities’ pre-dental society meetings. At recruitment fairs and other events, she spread the word of the upcoming opening of Texas’ newest dental school.

“I hit the road once our school had its Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board program approval,” Goldfarb said. “I was able to see a lot of prospective students face-to-face all over Texas and answer their questions about the school and El Paso.”

Goldfarb said interest in the school is very strong across the state, throughout the nation and even right here at home. She’s had the opportunity to speak to students in the University of Texas at El Paso’s Pre-Dental Society who will now have a chance to attend dental school locally.
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Prospective applicants are excited about the idea of the school’s all-new, state-of-the-art educational facilities, laboratories and equipment. The school will be housed in the new Medical Sciences Building II; staff expect to move into their offices and the Dental Learning Center this summer.

El Paso is tucked away in far West Texas, and Goldfarb said many of the students she’s talked to on her recruiting trips have never visited the Sun City. She said it’s easy to sell the benefits of El Paso – not only is it home to the first dental school in Texas in over 50 years, but our city is known for its sunny weather, outdoor activities, food, culture, shopping and entertainment.

“The prospective applicants I talk to are also very interested in our curriculum, which offers a very early clinical experience. They’ll have the opportunity to work in our clinic in their first semester; by the time they graduate, they’ll be ready to practice in clinics across our state, and most importantly, our West Texas region.” Goldfarb said.

As student recruitment proceeds, Dean Richard Black, D.D.S., M.S., and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Wendy Woodall, D.D.S., M.S., have been laying the groundwork for recruiting and hiring faculty.

In late spring, the school began advertising for several faculty positions, including an associate dean of clinical affairs, professors of oral and maxillofacial radiology and pathology, and instructors in anatomy, pharmacology, physiology, microbiology and immunology.

“We’re very excited to begin building our educational team for the Hunt School of Dental Medicine,” said Dr. Black. “When a new dental school is being opened, word gets around the state, the country, if not the world. We expect to attract some remarkably talented faculty to be a part of the new era of dental education at TTUHSC El Paso.”

Did you know?

To improve the accessibility of oral health care in the community, the Hunt School of Dental Medicine will offer reduced-cost dental care in its 38,000-square-foot public dental clinic. The clinic comes equipped with 130 treatment chairs and is expected to be the top dental-care destination for the public, as well as the TTUHSC El Paso community.

Renderings offer an exciting glimpse of the Hunt School of Dental Medicine’s future public clinic, where students will train alongside faculty. Renderings courtesy of BRW Architects.
Taking a cue from my favorite deadpan comedians, I often respond to ‘get-to-know-you’ questions in icebreakers or team-building exercises with a nimble “I’m smart, funny, beautiful and MODEST.” Not once in my quest for a chuckle have I included athletic. Comedy comes partly from the truth, and I’ve never seen myself or been recognized as an athlete.

This isn’t to say I’m inactive. I teach dance classes twice a week to elementary-age girls and have been practicing yoga since the age of 14. But running, catching a ball, or forced focus on a metric to determine a winner? That’s best left up to professionals.

As I’ve gotten older, I recognize my need for regular exercise. I’ve tried everything – CrossFit, Pure Barre, Pilates, the Tracy Anderson Method, POUND – but only a few have stuck: spin classes and Orangetheory Fitness. Now that I’ve added metrics to my physical activity, does that mean I’m an athlete?

In October 2019, I joined the Office of Institutional Advancement at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso as a senior writer. During a meeting in January, an offer was thrown out to the group: “Who wants to compete in the Center Against Family and Sexual Violence’s Mighty Mujer Triathlon with the TTUHSC El Paso team?”

I raised my hand.

Competitive exercise became my 2020 goal, and I wasn’t alone in my endeavor. The TTUHSC El Paso triathlon team consists of three other employees: Nadia Morales, Iskra Jacobo and Andrea Tawney. We all have varying reasons, motivations, challenges and goals for competing in Mighty Mujer.

Iskra, the associate managing director in the Information Technology Department, began training for triathlons when she decided to compete in the 2014 Mighty Mujer.

“I’ve been a triathlete for the last six years. I immediately fell in love with the triathlon life and the beautiful things that come with it, like training with my friends and my daughters, improving overall health, feeling energetic and handling stress,” Iskra said. “Nothing compares to that sense of accomplishment and the magic that comes from crossing the finish line.”

Nadia, a family medicine clerkship coordinator, said she was blessed to inherit a knack for sports and athletics.

“I thank my dad for the sports genes,” she said. “He played soccer in Ciudad Juárez and was also an amateur welterweight boxer.

“I played soccer in high school up to my mid-20s, then coed kickball, coed dodgeball, and then I fell in love with running. My father has always been my biggest fan, but also a tough critic. Like a coach.”

After some internet sleuthing, I discovered Nadia neglected to mention that she won three gold medals
and one bronze at the USA Track & Field Masters Outdoor Championships. She’s truly an athlete – and a humble one at that!

For Andrea, the vice president of Institutional Advancement, motivation comes from her family.

“I have a cousin my age who was recently diagnosed with brain cancer, and she’s a mom, wife, sister and daughter – definitely a Mighty Mujer,” Andrea said. “Our family did a 5k race over the Thanksgiving holiday to raise funds in her honor. I started thinking, I’ll be turning 40 soon and should do something to challenge my physical strength while I have the blessing of good health.”

Our team is a collection of women at different levels of fitness and triathlon experience, but one common challenge has presented itself to us all: training during a pandemic. Running with a group, access to roadways and pools, and the use of gyms have all changed due to COVID-19.

While Andrea has been able to devote more time to cycling and swimming thanks to warmer weather, a shared limitation for the rest of the group is an accessible pool.

Nadia, who is “petrified of pools” and a self-proclaimed “natural sinker,” says her obstacles include a lack of swimming skills and no access to a pool.

Similarly, Iskra doesn’t have access to a pool but is finding other ways to train during the pandemic. “I don’t want to take the risk of running outside, so I’m putting more time on my bike by using an indoor trainer,” she said.

My motivations to compete in the triathlon remained the same during the pandemic, only the means of achieving my goals have changed. I want to compete to join those Mighty Mujeres in my own personal life. I also want to prove to myself that I am an athlete, even if in the making.

Exercise in the time of COVID-19 has seen me give up my beloved studio classes for training with the digital masses on a Peloton bike. As part of the Peloton #BooCrew, I hear my newly acquired guru and virtual cycling instructor, Cody Rigsby, yelling from inside the screen, “Do not compromise who you are and what you came here to achieve,” but also, “It’s not that deep, Boo.”

The Center Against Family and Sexual Violence’s Mighty Mujer Triathlon was changed to a virtual race in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizers offered a bike-run in two distances and asked that participants complete the race July 25-26 with self-affirmed results.
Cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer’s disease, stroke and Type 2 diabetes are among the leading causes of death in El Paso County, according to the Texas Department of Health and Human Services.

Researchers at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso are working to change that.

Biomedical research at TTUHSC El Paso, located on the United States’ southern border, provides a glimpse of the future of our nation’s public health issues. Over 81% of the El Paso community is Mexican-American, and along with others of Latino background, is part of one of the fastest-growing minority groups in the country. A Brookings Institution study projects the U.S. population will be nearly 25% Latino by 2045.

However, research on health conditions affecting this broad demographic has historically lagged, and thus Latinos as a group face a high risk of chronic disease. For this reason, and as part of TTUHSC El Paso’s mission, it is vital to study genetic and environmental factors, and other influences affecting the health of the Paso del Norte’s Latino population.

**Centers of Emphasis**

As part of the TTUHSC El Paso Department of Molecular and Translational Medicine, the Center of Emphasis in Diabetes and Metabolism continues to grow as a hub of research in diabetes, obesity and related cardiovascular disorders, said David Cistola, M.D., Ph.D., interim vice president for research at TTUHSC El Paso.

In 2014, Dr. Cistola and his research team discovered a blood biomarker that identifies individuals with hidden risk for Type 2 diabetes or prediabetes. This discovery is potentially life-saving, as it could give patients an early warning and enough time to make lifestyle changes or initiate treatment to prevent Type 2 diabetes from developing.

In 2018, Dr. Cistola was awarded a two-year grant from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) to expand on his diabetes-screening discovery. “We have developed and patented new screening tools based on portable magnetic resonance technology,” Dr. Cistola said. “The measurements utilize a tiny drop of blood, or in some cases, the intact fingertip. These screening tools are being validated for future use in clinical settings.”

Dr. Munmun Chattopadhyay and her team of researchers focus their studies on diseases impacting Hispanic populations, including diabetes and cardiac atrophy.
Research in the Centers of Emphasis covers a wide variety of illnesses affecting the local population, and often connections are made from one disease to another.

“As the most common and deadly complication of diabetes is cardiovascular disease, the center’s work includes some elements of that, as well,” Dr. Cistola said.

Munmun Chattopadhyay, Ph.D., a researcher in the Center of Emphasis in Diabetes and Metabolism, is bioengineering cardiac tissue in collaboration with the University of Texas at El Paso.

The three-year project, funded by the National Science Foundation and the International Space Station’s U.S. National Laboratory, will send “artificial mini-hearts,” as Dr. Chattopadhyay describes them, to the space station to examine how microgravity affects the function of the human heart.

Dr. Chattopadhyay and UTEP biomedical engineer Binata Joddar, Ph.D., are collaborating in their Earth-bound labs to create tiny (less than 1 millimeter thick) heart-tissue structures, known as cardiac organoids, using human stem cells and 3D bioprinting technology.

By exposing the organoids to the near-weightless environment of the orbiting space station, the researchers hope to gain a better understanding of a condition known as cardiac atrophy, which is a reduction and weakening of heart tissue.

“Cardiac atrophy and a related condition, cardiac fibrosis, is a very big problem in our community. People suffering from diseases such as diabetes, muscular dystrophy and cancer, and conditions such as sepsis and congestive heart failure, often experience cardiac dysfunction and tissue damage,” Dr. Chattopadhyay said.

**SuCCCeS brings colorectal cancer screenings and preventive information to churches, health fairs, food pantries, low-income housing complexes, community centers and clinics serving the uninsured.**

Findings “SuCCCeS” in Cancer Prevention

In addition to being one of the leading causes of death in the U.S., cancer affects hundreds of El Pasoans of Hispanic descent every year. Specifically, colorectal cancer incidence and mortality rates are significant in El Paso County, and screening rates are very low, leading TTUHSC El Paso researchers to study data and create programs for early intervention.

In 2017, the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas awarded Navkiran Shokar, M.D., M.P.H., a three-year, $3.7 million grant to expand the Southwest Coalition for Colorectal Cancer Screening (SuCCCeS). Dr. Shokar is the interim associate dean for clinical research at the Foster School of Medicine, and director for Cancer Prevention and Control at TTUHSC El Paso.

SuCCCeS brings colorectal cancer screenings and preventive information to churches, health fairs, food pantries, low-income housing complexes, community centers and clinics serving the uninsured. The program has been added to the National Cancer Institute’s database of Research-Tested Intervention Programs, making its instructional and educational materials available to public health practitioners across the world.

As both El Paso and Latino populations across the U.S. continue to grow, researchers at TTUHSC El Paso are focused on understanding the intricacies of diseases that impact members of our community. Hard at work translating their newest findings into preventive measures and effective treatments, our researchers are fundamental in TTUHSC El Paso’s goal of keeping the Borderland healthy for years to come.
Valeria Varela was born and raised in El Paso and graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso. After obtaining her bachelor’s degree, she began attending the Foster School of Medicine, an option she’s proud to have in the Borderland.

“El Paso is my hometown, and I’m very proud that we have a medical school,” Varela said. “It allows people like myself – with family here, and roots – to pursue higher education without leaving the city.”

For Varela, another benefit of attending the Foster School of Medicine is its focus on health-related issues that impact the Paso del Norte region. “I was drawn to stay in El Paso for medical school because it’s one of the few schools that addresses the growing Hispanic population,” she said. “Our city has a need for physicians and for health care. I want to be a part of the solution in addressing my community’s needs.”

Varela was motivated to attend the Foster School of Medicine after completing an internship at the medical school while at UTEP. Her time at TTUHSC El Paso has been an eye-opening experience thanks to the unique fact that the curriculum differs from traditional four-year medical schools.

“I was most surprised at how quickly you begin to see patients. As part of our integrated curriculum, we participate in clinical simulations with real-life scenarios,” Varela said of her first year. “One of the aspects I really find beneficial is the medical Spanish course.”

The Foster School of Medicine requires all students to learn medical Spanish to better engage with the community, which is predominantly Spanish-speaking. Varela hopes to make the Foster family proud as a Foster Scholarship recipient. “They’re investing in my future and allowing me to achieve something greater than I could’ve imagined.”

After graduation, Varela aims to complete an OB-GYN residency program in the Paso del Norte region.
Jaime Carrillo was born and raised in Colombia, then moved to Texas to attend the University of Houston. He thought about becoming a musician, but his plans changed when an adviser encouraged him to study science. After shadowing physicians during undergraduate studies and visiting poverty-stricken neighborhoods in his hometown of Bogota, Colombia, Carrillo decided to pursue a career that would help people—medicine. He completed his bachelor’s degree in biology in 2014.

Carrillo decided the Foster School of Medicine was for him when he felt at home the moment he arrived. “Everybody was very friendly and warm, and I think that’s what made me choose the Foster School of Medicine over other medical schools,” he said.

Carrillo also enjoys the unique curriculum offered by the medical school. “I like that the Foster School of Medicine puts a lot of emphasis on border health, and that involves including medical Spanish in the curriculum,” he said.

The TTUHSC El Paso Department of Student Affairs made an impact on Carrillo as well. “You can talk to them very easily,” he said, recalling his first interview on campus. “I wasn’t affiliated with the school yet, and they were asking questions about me, which didn’t happen at interviews with other schools.”

One memory that stands out to him is caring for migrant farmworkers in the student-run Salud Sin Fronteras clinic. “There was a patient who represented all the things we learned from the social determinants of health in our first year,” Carrillo said. “He didn’t know English and he didn’t have insurance. We tried to address that, and to me, that was important.”

Carrillo is interested in family medicine or pediatrics and hopes to stay in El Paso to practice medicine with his wife, who also attended the Foster School of Medicine.

In 2019, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso celebrated the Foster School of Medicine’s 10-year anniversary.

The celebration culminated in February 2020 with “A Red Tie Affair For A White Coat Occasion,” a festive fundraising event where 100% of proceeds went toward medical student scholarships. These scholarships make a difference to aspiring physicians, helping them reach their dreams of providing quality health care to the Paso del Norte community. In a span of 10 months, the anniversary celebration raised over $775,000 for Foster School of Medicine student scholarships. In 2007, El Paso businessman Paul L. Foster donated $50 million to help establish the medical school that bears his name. Foster’s continued generosity also has funded a tuition scholarship program for many bright and talented students. In this issue, we share the stories of four of these remarkable individuals, proudly known as Foster Scholars.
Originally from the Houston area, Madeline Dixon received her bachelor’s degree in biomedical sciences at Texas A&M. She applied to several medical schools, and the Foster School of Medicine was the place of her first interview. It turned out to be her first choice.

“I had no idea what to expect when I came out to visit, but the city and the people really blew me away. I loved the school immediately,” Dixon said of her first impression of El Paso and the Foster School of Medicine. “The more I started looking into everything El Paso had to offer, I knew it was the right fit and the best school for me.”

Accommodating professors are one of the highlights of the program, Dixon said. “The professors are accessible to students not only inside the classroom, but also outside.” Additionally, the medical school’s presentation-based lectures are part of an innovative curriculum Dixon believes is preparing her for a career in medicine. “We’re able to learn material in a way that’s easy to digest, using real-world scenarios, and is symptom-based,” she said. “You’re not just going subject by subject; it’s very comprehensive in relation to what’s happening with a patient.”

As a Foster Scholarship recipient, Dixon said she’ll be able to graduate debt-free. The scholarship also made it possible for her to pursue a Masters in Public Health with the school’s dual-degree program. “I can do a residency program and specialize in an area that’s best for me, and not be confined by the financial burden of paying back loans,” she said. “This scholarship opens up my possibilities and allows me to spread my wings a bit more.”

Dixon plans to pursue an OB-GYN residency with a specialty in high-risk pregnancies.

"The Foster Scholarship opens up my possibilities and allows me to spread my wings a bit more."

— Madeline Dixon
"I’m eternally grateful to Mr. Foster for his donation to not only the school, but to my future. If I hadn’t received the Foster Scholarship, I’m not sure I would’ve been able to attend medical school." — Akhil Padarti
Kicking Things Off
As our university began its celebration of a special milestone, city, state and government officials helped kick things off beginning in 2019. During the regular El Paso City Council meeting on Aug. 20, Mayor Dee Margo proclaimed 2019 as the TTUHSC El Paso Paul L. Foster School of Medicine’s 10th Anniversary Year. In January 2020, State Rep. César Blanco presented a resolution to Richard Lange, M.D., M.B.A., president of TTUHSC El Paso, to commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the Foster School of Medicine. Additionally, on Feb. 11, 2020, U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar recognized the medical school’s 10-year anniversary with an official statement in the Congressional Record. All events came before the official celebration, “A Red Tie Affair For A White Coat Occasion.”

Lighting Up the City
In the month leading up to the 10-year celebration event, a special tribute was made in lights in Downtown El Paso. The Wells Fargo Building was lit with red Double T’s, and One San Jacinto Plaza, formerly known as Chase Tower, was lit in red.

A Night of Giving
A text-to-give platform and competition was introduced as the main fundraising component for the night. The winning table, guests hosted at the Hunt Family Foundation, were rewarded with a mini photo shoot with Raider Red, the Masked Rider and other local mascots. With close to $75,000 in donations made via text-to-give, “A Red Tie Affair For A White Coat Occasion” was the most successful event the giving platform has ever produced.
Fundraising in Style
The MD-to-Be Pop-Up Shop was conceptualized and constructed by the 10-Year Celebration Committee, which included Robin Furman, Tita Hunt and Claudia Chiu. The shop – complete with a balloon arch and a glowing sign from Bright Nights Custom Neon – promoted the evening’s text-to-give fundraising campaign with a fun, retail-type setting in the event’s lounge area.

A Mission Built on Generosity
With support from the community, TTUHSC El Paso is able to continue fulfilling its mission of improving lives in the Borderland and beyond. A special thanks to our major scholarship sponsors, including WestStar Bank, GECU, Peter Piper Pizza, the Chiu Family Foundation, Dean and Debbi Hester, and Transtelco, along with all of our generous donors who are transforming the future of health care.

Scholarships for the Next Generation of Physicians
Over a ten-month period, the Foster School of Medicine’s 10-year anniversary celebration raised more than $775,000 to support medical students. Raising funds to support deserving students was the primary goal of the event, and our donors helped to secure 26 scholarships, including 13 Single Scholarships, seven Double Scholarships, two Triple Scholarships and four Decade Scholarships.

Joined by the Red Raider Family
Emily Brodbeck, Texas Tech University’s Masked Rider mascot for the 2019-2020 academic year, was a special guest for the night. She and her horse, Fearless Champion, welcomed guests on the red carpet and provided picture-perfect photo ops. TTU’s costumed mascot, Raider Red, also made an appearance on the red carpet to delight guests and show school spirit.

TTUHSC El Paso Threads
In partnership with TTUHSC El Paso, locally owned Proper Printshop debuted their new collection of TTUHSC El Paso-branded apparel and accessories. A portion of proceeds from each purchase went toward scholarship funds for TTUHSC El Paso students. As a result of the night’s successful collaboration, TTUHSC El Paso and Texas Tech Physicians of El Paso polos, hoodies and hats are now available on Proper Printshop’s online store. The shop is the only vendor in El Paso that sells our university’s branded swag, and portions of sales continue to support student scholarships. TTUHSC El Paso items can be purchased at theproperprintshop.com/collections/texas-tech.
Celebrating, El Paso-Style
With music pumping, drinks flowing and guests dancing, the event’s lounge provided the perfect space for a night of fun. J&K Presents and their mixologists from Later, Later and Lost & Found conceptualized cocktails with alcohol provided by L&F Distributors. Cocktails included the School of Margaritas, The Resident, Red Raider with a Twist and Wreck ‘Em Water. Upon arrival, guests were welcomed by the lively music of Samba Alma de Fogo, a local samba-style percussion group, and the El Paso Youth Jazz Ensemble.

Colorful Collaboration
Creative Kids, a nonprofit, educational, community-based art agency in El Paso, invited five middle school students to create a live painting during the event. Every year, Creative Kids opens its doors to disadvantaged youth, children battling cancer and children with disabilities through various programs that combine healing with the arts. The painting created at the event will be housed in TTUHSC El Paso’s new Medical Sciences Building II.

A Big TTUHSC El Paso “Thank You”
Our 10-year celebration event would not have been a success without the support of our community partners. Their in-kind donations provided a one-of-a-kind experience while allowing all money raised to go directly toward students. A special thanks to Table Occasions, EPIC Railyard Event Center, L&F Distributors, J&K Presents and Clear Channel Outdoor for their event donations, and to Crave Catering, Anson11, L&J Cafe, Savage Goods, Rulis’ International Kitchen, Ámbar and La Perla at The Plaza Hotel Pioneer Park, Ruth’s Chris Steak House, Salt + Honey Bakery Café and Frontera Churros for their catering donations.

Best Selfies Forward
The 10-year celebration event was filled with fun photo ops, fit to be posted on social media. To promote the institution’s Instagram account, @TTUHSCEP, the Office of Institutional Advancement hosted a selfie contest during the event. The winner of the evening was Abhishek Dharan, a member of the Foster School of Medicine’s class of 2022.
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso had a lot to celebrate during National Nurses Week this year. As hardworking students from the Hunt School of Nursing stood on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, the week took on a special meaning, recognizing the immeasurable difference our future nurses made in the face of a health care crisis.

The Hunt School of Nursing kicked off National Nurses Week by announcing that all 86 students in its 2020 graduating class completed the clinical hours required to finish their degree program. Despite the local rise in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, nursing students remained committed to their education, taking on a new method of learning and unexpected, real-world experience in hospitals throughout El Paso.

In support of health care heroes, community partners came together to make the week a memorable occasion. On May 7, nurses and nursing students at local teaching hospitals were treated to an appreciation breakfast provided by a generous donation from Bruce and Jackie Gulbas. Bruce Gulbas is president of National Restaurant Supply and a member of the TTUHSC El Paso President’s Development Council.

Additionally, TTUHSC El Paso announced a $650,000 grant from the Helene Fuld Trust which established the first scholarship endowment for the Hunt School of Nursing. The nursing school offers the only accelerated B.S.N. program in the Paso del Norte region and is the only recipient in the region to have received a grant from the Helene Fuld Health Trust. The funds will be used for scholarships and to support students with immediate financial needs.

The end of National Nurses Week came with the exciting surprise announcement that one lucky nursing student would soon hit the road in a new Nissan Kicks crossover SUV. Casa Nissan, a member of the Team Casa family of local dealerships, announced their contribution of a complimentary one-year lease of the vehicle, along with basic maintenance services. Ronnie Lowenfield, general manager of Casa Ford Lincoln Nissan, is a member of the TTUHSC El Paso President’s Development Council.

TTUHSC El Paso’s celebration of nurses and nursing students continues during the rest of the year, joining the World Health Organization, which designated 2020 as the Year of the Nurse.
More than 200 students from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso began the next chapter of their lives after graduating in our university’s first-ever series of virtual commencement ceremonies. Collectively, the ceremonies amassed over 18,000 views as loved ones tuned in from across the country.

While social distancing protocols due to COVID-19 called for the cancellation of traditional ceremonies, students were still given their moment to shine. Ceremonies for all three schools at TTUHSC El Paso maintained traditional components, including keynote speakers and speeches from school deans and TTUHSC El Paso President Richard Lange, M.D., M.B.A.

With help from local news station KVIA ABC-7, two of TTUHSC El Paso’s commencement ceremonies surprised graduates with familiar faces. Main co-anchor Stephanie Valle read student names for the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences as a slideshow featured their photos and plans for the next steps of their careers. Both Valle and main co-anchor Erik Elken read student names for the Hunt School of Nursing and included a special message about their futures as local health care heroes.

At the request of students and staff, Lourdes Janssen, unit manager in the Office of Medical Education, read the names of Foster School of Medicine students while a slideshow shared where they would be attending their residencies.

Additionally, graduates from the Hunt School of Nursing received a DAISY in Training Award for their important roles in treating local patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the second DAISY in Training Award presented to a graduating class of the Hunt School of Nursing. The class of 2019 received the award for their role following the tragic mass shooting at an El Paso Walmart on Aug. 3, 2019. Throughout the day of their virtual ceremony, graduates from the school’s class of 2020 made scheduled visits to the TTUHSC El Paso campus to pick up their hard-earned diplomas and have their photos taken one-by-one.

Missed the live broadcasts? Links to all three recorded ceremonies can be found on the TTUHSC El Paso commencement page at ttuhscep.edu/commencement.

Photography by Yolanda Molina
A Better Fit
A change of plans during her undergraduate studies led Amanda Vega to a career in nursing. While she had envisioned a career in health care from the start, midway through college, her goals took a slight, but positive turn. “I was initially studying to become a physician, and it was during this process that I discovered nursing. I felt it would be a great fit for me,” Vega said.

With a new game plan, Vega set her sights on attending nursing school locally and enrolled in the Hunt School of Nursing. She felt ready for the challenge. “It was a grueling few semesters balancing school, work and volunteering at a local clinic, but all well worth it for a job I love,” Vega said.

Full-Time Dedication
The Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at the Hunt School of Nursing allows students to earn their degree in 16 months, preparing them to enter the workforce as soon as possible. For Vega, this meant placing her focus almost solely on school.

Vega hit her stride and immersed herself into the curriculum. Though she spent many late nights studying, the feeling of achievement was immeasurable. After completing clinical rotations in the emergency department, she knew emergency nursing was the path for her.

Along the way, it was both her peers and the faculty at the Hunt School of Nursing who inspired Vega and helped prepare her for a fulfilling career.

Photography by Tommie Morelos

During the COVID-19 pandemic, “I still receive messages from her often, checking in with me, especially during these difficult times with the ongoing pandemic – she really sets the example as a nurse, educator and mentor for nurses new and old,” she said.

Surging Ahead
After graduating from the Hunt School of Nursing in December 2018, Vega began her job as an R.N. in the emergency department at The Hospitals of Providence. Since then, she’s had several valuable experiences, and through it all, one vital lesson has been reinforced: “It’s important to educate yourself and make sure you’re healthy and whole so that you’re able to give your all to your patients. You cannot pour from an empty glass,” she said.

As she continues to serve the El Paso community in the emergency room, Vega has plans to take the advice of her mentors and advance her education. She’s working toward board certification in emergency nursing and exploring the possibility of an advanced-practice nursing degree.

Her best advice for nursing students? “Some days you’re going to wonder if you’re cut out to be a nurse, and you are! Take your new transition day by day, find a good mentor, and just know that it doesn’t get easier, but you get better every single day.”
Servando Rivera, M.D., M.S.

Graduate School Alumnus Follows Path to Becoming a Physician at TTUHSC El Paso

Servando Rivera, M.D., knew he wanted to pursue a career in the health sciences from the time he was in high school. Like many hometown students at TTUHSC El Paso, his journey started in the Sun City and now continues at our health sciences center, where he began his graduate education.

“I was motivated to study health sciences when I realized biological sciences focuses on innovative research to help find treatments for diseases such as cancer and other medical conditions,” Dr. Rivera said.

With that motivation in mind, Dr. Rivera began working toward his bachelor’s degree in biological sciences at the University of Texas at El Paso. During his senior year, he decided becoming a physician was the ultimate goal – but first, he wanted to gain valuable experience by working with research and biomedical scientists in a graduate school setting.

Staying in the Borderland

While completing his undergraduate studies, Dr. Rivera became an intern in the TTUHSC El Paso Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences’ Summer Accelerated Biomedical Research (SABR) Program. The SABR Program is 10-week paid internship that offers students experience in research and graduate education. After taking on an interest in researching diseases prevalent in the Borderland community, and meeting Rajkumar Lakshmanaswamy, Ph.D., dean of the GSBS, his decision to attend graduate school locally was solidified.

“My family was a big motivator, as well as Dr. Raj and other great faculty who were always willing to give great advice and counsel on any academic endeavors,” Dr. Rivera said.

After graduating from UTEP, Dr. Rivera began his studies at the GSBS, where he dove into biomedical research and got hands-on laboratory experience. The work was exciting and challenging. Along the way, he learned patience and perseverance – qualities of a good researcher.

“I remember spending countless hours at the lab finishing experiments – and failing to yield results. I would repeat it again and improve the protocol,” Dr. Rivera recalled. “I believe anyone doing research can agree that it is tedious and full of long timelines, but overall, challenges mold a better scientist.”

Dr. Rivera said support from faculty went a long way during his education at the GSBS, helping him reach a big milestone in his educational journey.

“I enjoy the family feel at TTUHSC El Paso. It’s one-of-a-kind, with faculty who will push you to be the best you can be,” Dr. Rivera said. “I remember very clearly when I finished and submitted my research manuscript. It was one of the best days of my life. I was cleared to graduate and all the requirements were met.”

The TTUHSC El Paso Journey

That milestone didn’t mark the end of Dr. Rivera’s time at TTUHSC El Paso. After graduating from the GSBS, he was accepted to the Foster School of Medicine and began a new chapter of his life – this time, as a medical student. He graduated from the medical school in May and began his residency in TTUHSC El Paso’s Department of Emergency Medicine in July.

As for the future of his career, Dr. Rivera is still deciding between academic or private medicine. Like the mentors who guided him, he enjoys teaching and the academic environment of medicine. Though he said the health care field can be competitive and challenging, one lesson has always stood out: “Follow your heart! You will discover the path is more enjoyable when you love what you do.”

Photography by Tommie Morelos
Osagie Usen, M.D.
From Lubbock to El Paso, a Foster School of Medicine Graduate’s Journey as a Red Raider Continues

Graduated: Foster School of Medicine, 2019
Hometowns: New York, New York/El Paso, Texas
Resident, Department of Internal Medicine
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso

A three-time Red Raider, Osagie Usen, M.D., graduated from Texas Tech University with a B.S. in nutrition and dietetics in 2012 and went on to earn a B.S. in clinical laboratory science from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Lubbock in 2014. He graduated from the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso Foster School of Medicine in 2019.

Family Ties
While professional athlete was his dream job, a family full of doctors steered Dr. Usen toward the medical field.

“I grew up in a medical family – my father is a pediatrician in El Paso and my mother is a former veterinarian. I was certainly exposed to the medical field,” Dr. Usen said. “Becoming a professional athlete wasn’t feasible because of a slew of sports-related injuries. Medicine was all I really cared to pursue.”

Following in his family’s footsteps – and in pursuit of a career in medicine – Dr. Usen began applying to medical school while obtaining his second bachelor’s degree at TTUHSC.

A Life-Changing Surprise
Back home in El Paso, Dr. Usen’s interest in attending the Foster School of Medicine made him a welcomed regular at the school’s Office of Admissions, and his friendly demeanor never went unnoticed by faculty and staff.

A special, surprise invitation to the Office of Admissions’ annual holiday party would become an unforgettable moment in Dr. Usen’s medical career.

“I was invited to a white elephant party the day after interviewing with the Foster School of Medicine. I had no clue the reason behind the invitation,” Dr. Usen said. “There, I was surprised with a letter of acceptance during the gifting process. It was a very emotional moment.”

Once he began his studies at the school of medicine, Dr. Usen continued to make an impression on the TTUHSC El Paso family.

“You would always see Osagie studying around campus,” said Brianna Huffman, associate director of special projects with the Office of Institutional Advancement, and former staff with the Foster School of Medicine Office of Admissions. “He knew everyone and everyone knew him. He’s a joy to be around.”

Dr. Usen’s time with TTUHSC El Paso now continues post-medical school. He’s currently finishing his first year of the internal medicine residency program at TTUHSC El Paso.

“Residency has been very enlightening. I’ve genuinely enjoyed every rotation thus far,” Dr. Usen said. “Only time will determine where life takes me.”

When he’s not busy caring for patients and learning from his mentors at TTUHSC El Paso, Dr. Usen spends time taking care of his own physical health. “I’m getting back into my past athletic pursuits,” he said. “My new hobby is amateur bodybuilding.”

As for the future, life may take Dr. Usen anywhere across the globe, but his long-term plans are centered around the Sun City.

“I could certainly see myself in a multitude of specialties, as well as being a hospitalist. Ultimately, I see myself working medicine in El Paso – like my father – after my residency program ends.”
The Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso Employee Giving Campaign (EGC) is a simple way for faculty and staff to give back to the institution they love. Funds raised from EGC donors are used exclusively for on-campus initiatives, including research, education and improved access to quality health care in the Paso del Norte region. 

“Receiving a scholarship during nursing school would’ve helped me. I want to help promote nursing in the community and encourage El Paso to support them.”

JACLYN REYES, R.N., M.S.N.
Instructor, Hunt School of Nursing

“Getting a scholarship during nursing school would’ve helped me. I want to help promote nursing in the community and encourage El Paso to support them.”

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“It’s easy to quit, it isn’t easy to persevere. I dropped out of nursing school three times. Giving back for me is about giving my resources and my time. Our students need to know their path in nursing is not an easy one, but I’m here to help them.”

MANNY SANTA CRUZ, D.N.P., R.N., M.B.A.
Assistant Dean, R.N. to B.S.N. Track, and Assistant Professor, Hunt School of Nursing

“Getting a scholarship during nursing school would’ve helped me. I want to help promote nursing in the community and encourage El Paso to support them.”

JACLYN REYES, R.N., M.S.N.
Instructor, Hunt School of Nursing

“Helping cancer research, in my view, will help everyone. I’m blessed to be able to give back.”

CALVIN SHANKS
Senior Director, Department of Safety Services
“We’re all part of an organization that is benefiting the community. I contribute to improve this community and to share the values and mission of the institution.”

CHRISTIANE HERBER-VALDEZ, ED. D.
Managing Director, Institutional Research and Effectiveness, and Assistant Professor, Department of Medical Education

“I want to support Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso to greatness. Bigger, better and believing in ourselves!”

ALAN TYROCH, M.D., FACS, FCCM
Chair of Surgery and Professor, Department of Surgery

“Every gift makes a difference. Make an impact by giving to what you love through the TTUHSC El Paso Employee Giving Campaign.”

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Your gift today leaves a lifelong impact on students affected by COVID-19.

Invest in our future health care heroes by giving to the TTUHSC El Paso Student Frontline Emergency Fund!

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