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# Laredo Morning Times

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MEXICO  
**Zetas ran state prison**  
Report details 2010-11 takeover

By Maria Verza  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MEXICO CITY — Officially it was a Mexican prison, but inside it hid another reality: a center of operations where the Zetas drug cartel modified vehicles, manufactured uniforms, locked up kidnapped victims and cremated bodies using diesel fuel.

Some details of the case were previously known. But a report released Tuesday by two university professors who specialize in human rights sheds new light on how one of Mexico's bloodiest criminal



*Zetas continues on A8*

Adriana Alvarado / AP

**Soldiers guard the state prison in Piedras Negras, Mexico in 2012. A report finds Zetas used the prison as a center of operations in 2010-11.**



Courtesy / Palafox Hospitality

**This architectural rendering shows the proposed design for the downtown convention center. Casa Ortiz and 907 Zaragoza St. are shown in the foreground, with the convention center wrapping around on the east, south and west sides. La Posada Hotel is the adjacent building with the red roof.**

## PROPOSED PLANS UNVEILED

### Modern structure would overlook the Rio Grande

By Julia Wallace  
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

Laredo's long-awaited downtown convention center is designed to incorporate two historic homes into its plans for a new, modern structure that overlooks the Rio Grande.

A plan presented to City Council on Monday shows that the proposed convention center would wrap around the east, south and west sides of Casa Ortiz and the unoccupied baby blue house that is next door at 907 Zaragoza St.

Council voted unanimously to enter into a memorandum of understanding with Palafox Hospitality, a subsidiary of Fas-

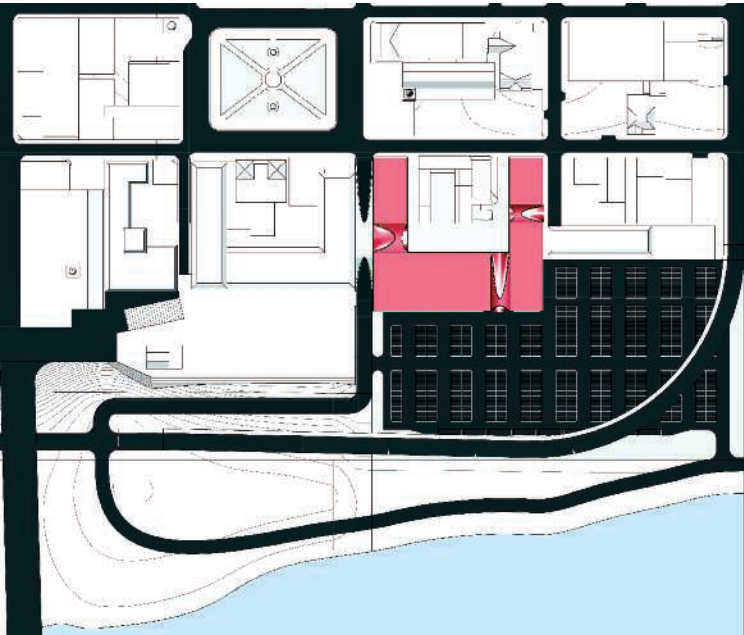
ken Oil and Ranch that manages La Posada Hotel, to provide a framework for this project's development.

There is not yet a cost estimate for the convention center, but the agreement stipulates that the city will pay for construction costs as well as for the building's furniture, fixtures and equipment.

The city will also "consider providing an abatement or reimbursement" of a portion of La Posada's property taxes, according to the MOU. They may also consider waiving building permit fees or "other incentives that may be available for the project."

Palafox has already pur-

*Plans continues on A10*



Courtesy / Palafox Hospitality

**The proposed site for the convention center is shown in red wrapping around Casa Ortiz and 709 Zaragoza St. La Posada Hotel is to the left.**

## OBITUARY

### Rosy Gregory dies at 55

By César G. Rodriguez  
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

A Laredo woman described as a champion of the community and a true friend of law enforcement has died.

On Tuesday, Rosy Gregory died while surrounded by loved ones and her closest friends at a local hospital. She was 55.

Community leaders recalled her impact on Laredo.

"Rosy was very passionate about helping her community," said Veronica Jimenez, program director for the Webb County Community Coalition of Serving Children and

*Rosy continues on A10*



Courtesy photo / Laredoans Against Drunk Driving

**Rosy Gregory, left, and Elizabeth Alonzo Villarreal visited Laredo Community College earlier this year before spring break to raise awareness on the consequences of drinking and driving.**

## LAREDO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

### Small Business Saturday slated

By Andrea Castañeda  
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

A dollar spent at a locally owned and operated business goes a long way. By shopping small and local, consumers contribute to the growth of their community.

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce together with the Small Business Development Center announced Tuesday its participation in this year's Small Business Saturday, taking place Nov. 25. The national campaign dedicates a Saturday to support local

businesses, goods and services that lead to job creation and economic growth.

Miriam Castillo, vice president of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, said small enterprises play an important role in the local economy. She noted that 68 cents from every dollar spent at a small, locally owned business stays in the community. So a purchase at a small business is an investment in the future of a local community. Castillo said the money goes toward enhancing the parks, roads and services

*Chamber continues on A10*

**TODAY'S WEATHER**

HIGH LOW  
**66 43**

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**LOTTO**

MEGA | 3,722,275,033 CASH FIVE | 6,718,25,27  
PICK 3 | Day: 0,7,6 Night: 8,4,3  
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FROM THE COVER

ROSY

From page A1

Adults in Need. “She was always helping those in need. She was a great advocate, leader and friend. I remember always telling her to slow down and take a break, especially lately when she was very ill.

“She would always tell me she felt she needed to do what she did best and that was to help educate the community about the dangers of drinking and driving. You would see Rosy at every community event trying to make a difference every day.”

Jimenez said Gregory helped raise awareness of drinking and driving, drugs and cancer, among many other issues.

“Through her hard work she was able to give away turkeys to people in need during Thanksgiving, toys during Christmas to the kids in the colonias, scholarships for high school graduates and many other wonderful acts of kindness,” Jimenez said. “She was truly a blessing to this community. It was truly an honor to have met such a humble and dedicated person. Rosy worked so hard for more than 30 years trying to make this community a better place.”

Gregory never sought recognition. She did everything from the kindness of her heart, Jimenez said.

“I am glad many of us were able to recognize her hard work when she was still with us. She was part of many organizations where she was able to make many friendships. We will miss you Rosy. You are one in a million,” Jimenez said.

Mary Zapata, mother of slain ICE Special Agent Jaime J. Zapata, said Gregory played a key role in having a bronze bust of her son placed at the Shiloh Tower, which is home to several law enforcement agencies.

But Gregory did not stop there. She raised funds for scholarships to be distributed on Zapata’s birthday in May. Gregory led a nonprofit group called Friends of Jaime J. Zapata.



Cuate Santos / Laredo Morning Times

**Martin High School Principal Guillermo Pro stands by Rosy Gregory, a long-time advocate against drunk driving and drugs, as she spoke to students at a Red Ribbon Anti-Drug Rally at Martin High School on Oct. 18, 2017.**

“She meant a lot to us from the very beginning. She gave a lot of her time to the cause of fundraising scholarships for Laredo students,” Mary Zapata said.

Zapata last saw Gregory on Saturday at the hospital. She came down to Laredo to give Gregory a rosary she had purchased for her.

“She was a leader, one that did not see any obstacles. We are forever thankful for all that she did,” Zapata said. “She was a very giving person. I think Laredo has lost an icon.”

Laredo Police Assistant Chief Jesus R. Torres also remembered Gregory dearly.

“She was one of those icons in the community that was always in the forefront for the safety of our children and reduce the incidents of DUIs in the streets,” Torres said.

He added, “She was a true friend of the Laredo Police Department and law enforcement community in general. A true advocate for public safety.”

Torres said Gregory’s positive thinking was contagious.

“We are grateful we had her, a person of that caliber, in our society and in our community. She will be truly missed,” Torres said.

Webb County Sheriff Martin Cuellar said he considered Gregory his best friend.

“It’s very sad that she passed away. She was a

very strong person,” Cuellar said. “She was a very strong supporter of law enforcement ... What she has done, you don’t see it in a lot of people.”

Webb County Court at Law II Judge Victor Villarreal described Gregory’s death as a “great loss to Laredo.”

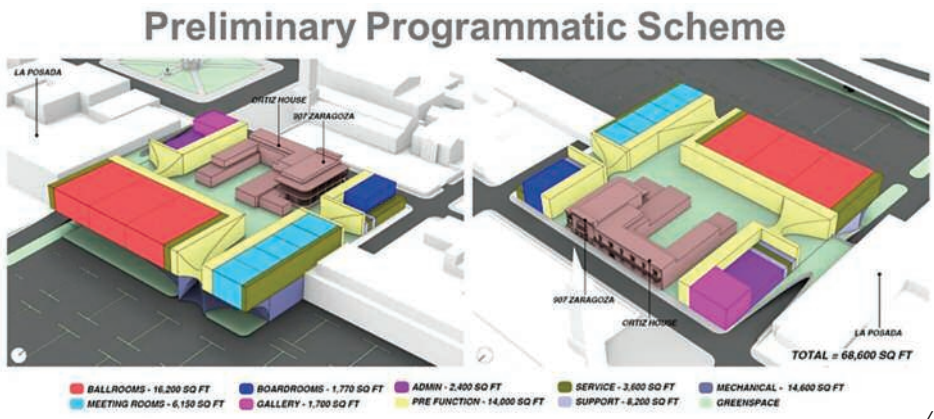
“Rosy Gregory is an example in kindness and public service. She was always warmhearted and gave herself to people she knew and people she did not know. We’re going to miss her greatly,” the judge said.

Gregory become involved with Villarreal’s DWI court, where she offered extensive advice on how to address the problems of drunk driving. Villarreal said Gregory always wanted to lend a helping hand.

“It’s very unfortunate that a person who has devoted her entire life toward being an activist and a pillar in the Laredo community is no longer with us,” added El Cenizo Mayor Raul Reyes.

Gregory was the vice president of Laredoans Against Drunk Driving, or LADD. LADD President Elizabeth Alonzo Villarreal said Gregory opened the doors for the organization because of her community involvement.

“We lost somebody big. A great person. A great friend,” Villarreal said. “Those are going to be some big boots to fill. Not shoes. She loved country western.”



This mock-up shows the individual components of the proposed convention center. The gallery and administrative offices are where the San Agustin Ballroom is currently, for reference. And a parking lot currently takes up the space where the board rooms are proposed to go.

PLANS

From page A1

chased the blue house in anticipation of this project, according to Jose Ceballos, a consultant for the Fasken Group. They have agreed to donate this land and the current San Agustin Ballroom, which will be knocked down for the convention center.

Palafox will also be covering design costs, survey costs, environmental and historic study costs, and costs for advertising and promoting the convention center. Plus, they will make “reasonable efforts” to brand La Posada with a nationally recognized hotel chain.

Ceballos said they are exploring boutique hotel brands within larger chains so that people attending these conventions would receive benefits from that network. La Posada’s name would remain, he said.

Historic structures

At Monday’s meeting, Bill Skeen, representing the Fasken Group, said that integrating and preserving these two historic homes on Zaragoza Street was not part of their original plan.

“But it moved into the plan, and we think it’s a big benefit,” Skeen said. “(The Laredo) Convention and Visitors Bureau have groups that like to come to Laredo. What do they want to do? They want to have the cultural experience, the historic experience of Laredo, Texas and Mexico. And we think by integrating those homes we’ve addressed that.”

Casa Ortiz is currently owned by the county, but the MOU states that “Palafox has held favorable discussions with Webb County officials regarding this structure,” and that it will either be donated or leased to the city.

Ceballos said a small portion of Casa Ortiz was

built in 1830, and another portion in 1872. It’s 6,920 square feet in total that could be used for museum or exhibit space, although it needs about \$700,000 in repair work, Ceballos said.

The blue home on Zaragoza that Palafox now owns is in good shape, Ceballos noted Tuesday. It’s a 4,940-square-foot space built around 1872 that could be used for a meeting space or for another purpose that complements the convention center, Ceballos said.

But neither of these spaces have been officially defined.

Ceballos said the preliminary architectural plan for the convention center itself calls for a modern design. So as a whole, the site will be a mix of historical and contemporary structures.

This integration will make Laredo’s convention center a unique, niche destination, Ceballos said.

Convention center details

The plan for the convention center includes:

- » A 21,000-square-foot ballroom overlooking the Rio Grande with a capacity for 1,270 people, seated
- » Six meeting rooms
- » Two board rooms
- » A built-in studio with an audio/visual system
- » Two outdoor terraces, one 6,000 square feet and the other 4,000 square feet
- » Outdoor catering capacity from the ballroom kitchen
- » Integration with Casa Ortiz for an exterior courtyard space
- » A pedestrian bridge that connects to La Posada next door

In his presentation to City Council, Skeen said the center can handle 206 10x10-foot exhibit booths.

Half of the space is dedicated to restrooms, pre-function space, administrative offices, storage areas and a commercial kitchen, Skeen said.

“It’s all of the support

space that it takes to make that facility workable,” he said.

The only portion of the proposed site that is in the floodplain is some of the first-floor space, Skeen said. The space, however, will be flood resistant.

The parking area below has about 500 spaces. Skeen said people will be able to park there for free to access the convention center and the rest of the downtown area.

However part of this area is occupied by the General Services Administration, which manages federal government buildings. The MOU states that the city and Palafox will need to reach an agreement with the GSA to lease or acquire this property. Customs and Border Protection has been cooperative thus far, Ceballos said.

Future plans

Ceballos said this center will be perfect for conventioners who are looking to experience Mexico without having to leave the U.S.

There are no other convention centers in a 150-mile radius, he noted, so they are looking to host groups of around 300 people as they get started.

This MOU is in effect for 120 days while the city and Palafox negotiate a development agreement “for the design, development, construction, operation and management of the project.”

The city and Palafox anticipate they can reach a property agreement with GSA by March to acquire the property by December 2018. Choosing a contractor, which is contingent on City Council approval, could take place by March, according to their timetable. And if all that stays on track, demolition and construction could begin by October to have a grand opening by September 2020

CHAMBER

From page A1

es in Laredo.

“So really, supporting a small business is supporting our community,” Castillo said. “And it’s contributing to having better and bigger things for Laredo.”

Small businesses have a further positive impact on communal life. Additionally, local shops create an opportunity for budding entrepreneurs to flourish and for small business owners to establish a relationship with customers.

Erika Lamar Buentello is a local artist and owner of Flynn Craft House, which specializes in original illustrations, prints and handmade paper goods. Buentello said she loves making her artwork and also having the opportunity to sell it. As an artist, Buentello knows the importance of creativity. She said she believes in promoting creative ventures to benefit fellow artists and the local community.

“I think being a small business owner really helps to keep me active as an artist and then connect with my community,” she said. “Selling my stuff in person is one of the best things and it’s so much fun to meet people.”

Hecho a Mano Handmade Market was brought to life by Buentello in 2015. The handmade market gives local vendors a space to sell their one-of-a-kind, “hecho a mano y con amor,” pieces.

“We’re really excited to



Cuate Santos / Laredo Morning Times

**Laredo Chamber of Commerce Small Business Committee Co-Chair Araceli Vela talks about the importance of shopping local at a news conference Tuesday. The chamber hosted the conference to promote Small Business Saturday, which will be held Saturday, Nov. 25.**

be bringing small business owners together and create an avenue for people to create and for people to shop locally and especially handmade. We believe a lot in it,” Buentello said.

While big box stores and small businesses each provide a product or service, Castillo said, the difference between the two is the intimate experience provided by small shops.

“There’s always that special touch that small

business owners give to you when they serve your coffee or even simple tasks like greeting you as you walk in. I think that’s what small businesses offer, the unique experience of feeling like you’re part of the family. You’re part of their business, you know. I think that’s why it’s important for the community to support small businesses because what makes small business owners happy is to see their customers happy,” Castillo said.

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