

Bishop Flores to bless new Las Milpas library

By Steve Taylor

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LAS MILPAS, RGV – Bishop Daniel Flores will bless the new South Pharr Development and Research Center on Tuesday.

The facility, which includes a public library and recreation center, was officially opened by Pharr Mayor Ambrosio Hernandez and the Pharr City Commission on Jan. 11.

“This is something we have dreamed about for 15, 20 years. Not only dreamed about but worked for, diligently, by educating and organizing our constituency, our leaders in our church, in our communities,” said Eddie Anaya, a Valley Interfaith leader in Las Milpas.

“Tuesday, we will have a wonderful celebration with the community, the bishop and our priest.”

As evidence of the talent in Las Milpas, Anaya pointed to the latest 'Blue Ribbon' school campus nominations.



"Five elementary schools out of the 26 recognized are in the Las Milpas area. It just goes to show the character of the community, the vision and dream of the parents to have their kids become somebody. Education is the key."

Asked how much of a struggle it was to secure support for the new library and resource center, Anaya said: "This is a community that came about through struggle, by overcoming its low socioeconomic levels. The hard work of the community shows the heart and the vision of our people and what they want for the next generation."

Anaya added: "We are just so happy our hard work has come to fruition."

Anaya spoke at the official opening of the South Pharr Development and Research Center. As did his son, Aaron Anaya and his friend, Astrid Alfaro.



Rio Grande Guardian anchor Mari Regalado interviewed Las Milpas community leader Eddie Anaya for livestream on Facebook.

Aaron Anaya was 14 when, in September 2014, he spoke at a Pharr City Commission meeting in support of the City building a public library. Many teenagers from Las Milpas also attended the meeting.

They were shocked to be told by the city leadership that they could not have a public library. It made the youngsters all the more determined to mobilize the public behind their cause.

"At that age, you think everything is going to go your way. When we were told no, we cannot have a library, it really opened my eyes. I thought this might not happen. It served as a motive for me to mobilize. To be told it is not in the budget, it is not going to happen makes the opening of this center all the more special," Aaron Anaya said.

Asked what he learned from the incident, Aaron Anaya said: "One thing I learned is that organizing is not easy. We had to push our own community. We held house meetings to build support and, eventually, we all came together and realized we needed to fight. One of the big statements we made was holding an accountability session for the city candidates. It was a packed house. At that point, I realized we had the chance to change things. Like the mayor said in his remarks at the official opening of the library, a promise made, a promise kept."

Alfaro said she and her friends are "extremely proud" of their efforts to secure a recreational center and public library. She said it was appalling that a population of 30,000 had to wait so long.

"I will never forget the meeting at city hall when we were shut down. We were told there was no money so to see this building, we are extremely proud. To be able to pass time with our friends or study, it is going to be special. It is going to help because many people do not have access to the Internet at home."

According to Pharr city officials, the South Pharr Development and Research Center will serve as a "multi-disciplinary technology, research, and training facility."

In a news release, the City of Pharr stated: "The large venue space and exhibit hall will be available for large meetings and educational sessions. Residents will

be able to use the center to conduct research, to attend workforce trainings, to develop a variety of skills, to attend career and business fairs, and to utilize computer workstations with Wi-Fi internet access, which will allow them to create resumes and search for and apply for jobs.”

The project was partially funded through the U.S. Economic Development Administration and leveraged by city funds.

“The City of Pharr, along with our Rio Grande Valley region continues to grow and we must work to ensure that our residents are equipped with the necessary resources needed to remain employed and competitive within our expanding workforce market,” Hernandez said.

“This facility will help contribute to the social and economic vitality of our South Pharr residents and those across the RGV. We look forward to the community and region benefitting from this center for years to come.”

In addition to its community-based services, Hernandez said, the facility will be utilized as an International Trade Center by the city, providing space for professional meetings, trainings, and as a Disaster Recovery Command Center in the case of a natural disaster or emergency. The Pharr International Bridge will also use the building to conduct meetings and trainings with their international partners from Mexico.

“With our proximity to the border, our international bridge, and the demand for jobs and workforce training, this facility will also serve as a vital resource for our international trade partners in hosting meetings, trainings, and events,” Hernandez added.

Editor’s Note: Rio Grande Guardian anchor Mari Regalado interviewed Valley Interfaith leader Eddie Anaya about the transformation of Las Milpas for a livestream on Facebook.



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