



# The Palo Alto Gazette

*A Newsletter of Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site*

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## Taking Nothing For Granted

### Palo Alto seeks alternative sources of funding

In May of 1846, Ulysses S. Grant received his first taste of battle of his notable career on the prairie of Palo Alto. In 1999, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site is seeking ways to attract more grants to the battlefield.

Since arriving at his new post, park superintendent, David Vela, has concentrated on finding ways to fund projects set forth in the park's General Management Plan. Working closely with representatives of the City of Brownsville and a number of local and regional partners, the park has developed grant proposals aimed at funding preservation and development activities at Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, and Fort Brown.

The Brownsville Community Foundation, local philanthropist Mary Yturria, and the City of Brownsville joined the park in submitting a grant proposal to the Houston Endowment to fund the park's permanent visitor center, access road, and trail system at the battlefield site. In the ensuing months, the park and its partners have worked closely with the Houston Endowment to refine this request for consideration by the

endowment board this fall. If approved, this package would enable the park to begin construction on permanent facilities in the near future.

The park is also working closely with the City of Brownsville on an equally ambitious project for the

Transportation Enhancement Program. The City has also voted to supplement any grant money with matching funds that would be used to purchase the 35-acre Resaca de la Palma National Historic Landmark as a city park. Funds would also be



If funding proposals are successful, visitors soon may have access to the scenery of the Resaca de la Palma battlefield.

Resaca de la Palma battlefield. The city has completed a proposal to purchase the Resaca de la Palma site with funds available through the Statewide

used by the city--with technical support from the park--to create an interpretive trail on the battlefield. A final aspect of this plan is the construction of an administrative/visitor contact station on

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# Law Enforcement Bill Signed Into Law

Effective immediately, law enforcement personnel of the National Park Service have powers of arrest, search, and seizure as to any offense under the laws of Texas committed within the boundaries of a national park or national recreation area.

During the recent legislative session, Park Superintendent, David Vela, worked closely with State Senator Eddie Lucio and his staff to provide limited state law enforcement authority to commissioned law enforcement officers of the National Park Service. Senate Bill 965 (SB 965) was drafted and authored by Senator Lucio and was sponsored in the Texas House by State Representative Jim Solis of Harlingen.

The Bill was passed in the Texas Legislature by a unanimous vote and was signed into law by Governor George



Superintendent David Vela recognizes State Senator Eddie Lucio's assistance with Senate Bill 965 during an August 5, 1999 ceremony at park headquarters.

cooperation of law enforcement colleagues at all levels of government.

The National Park Service is grateful for the leadership and efforts made by Senator Lucio and

Bush on June 18, 1999. The passage of this legislation will in no way affect the positive relations and cooperation that national parks in Texas have enjoyed over the years with law enforcement partners. Park Rangers will continue to rely upon the support and

Representative Solis in carrying this legislation forward to final passage. Special thanks also go to John Benjamin, Superintendent of Lake Meredith National Recreation Area, for his assistance with SB 965 as well as a similar Bill that was sponsored in the Texas House

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## Nothing For Granted

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the site. This facility would be leased to Palo Alto Battlefield to serve as park headquarters.

City ownership of the battlefield would ensure the preservation of an important national and international landmark. The placement of park headquarters at Resaca de la Palma would provide a permanent administrative and interpretive presence at the site.

A decision on this proposal may be made by the Texas Department of Transportation by the end of this year.

As these proposals move forward

ward, the earthen fieldwork of Fort Brown also remains a priority. The park is investigating methods for preserving and interpreting this site and plans to work with the International Boundary and Water Commission, the University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College, and the Palo Alto National Park Committee to develop strategies to achieve these goals.

Although Palo Alto Battlefield receives federal funds, these outside sources of money are vital to achieving park goals. As threats to these historic sites

wants to act as quickly and as effectively as possible to protect them—using federal funds, grants, donations, and any other alternatives available.

These funding strategies are becoming increasingly common in the National Park Service. In recent years, many parks have turned to government/private sector partnerships to achieve park objectives. In some instances, federal funding has been contingent on cooperation with outside partners or matching funds. Alternative money sources also allow parks to provide popular facilities and programs that may not be covered by federal appropriations.

# News and Notes

## Land Purchases Moves Forward

Land acquisition at Palo Alto continues with the addition of another 50 acres of property within the designated park boundary. The purchase provides the park with another plot of land within the core area of the battlefield and leaves the park in possession of 456 of its 3,400 designated acres.

This sale, completed in July, came after the National Park Service Lands Office in Santa Fe, New Mexico, made offers to the property holder in June. Palo Alto added another fifteen acres earlier this year. The National Park Service is also awaiting a response to its offer for another 583 acre expanse of land within the park's boundary.

## Trail Rehabilitation

With the assistance of Cameron County Sheriff Omar Lucio and the Sheriff Department's Community Service Program, the park has refurbished its interpretive trail at the battlefield.

Although the trail at Palo Alto is only a few hundred feet long and opened late last year, the gravel pathway had been eroded by spring rains and partially covered by rapidly-spreading plant life. In a major overhaul, the park raised the trail surface by four inches, widened portions of the path, and placed borders along the trail to prevent additional erosion.



Inmates from the Cameron County Detention Facility and Sheriff Department supervisors put the final touches on the park trail rehabilitation project.

The project was undertaken from July 13-15. During that period, inmates from the Cameron County Correction facility, Sheriff Department supervisors, and park staff moved more than 25 tons of gravel to complete the resurfacing effort. Park volunteer Jesse Camarillo coordinated and supervised the project for the park.

## Summer Programs Completed

Palo Alto's Division of Interpretation recently completed another series of Junior Ranger programs, completing a third year of summer activities.

Park Ranger Karen Weaver planned and taught the three-day classes. Over the course of five weeks, some 45 children received hands-on lessons about camp life, battlefield techniques, and general challenges facing the soldiers of the U.S.-Mexican War.

The program also featured an attempt to reach out to younger

audiences. As in the past, Palo Alto directed its Junior Ranger program primarily toward the 9-12 year-old age group. This year, however, the park also offered sessions for children 6-8 years old. The park will be assessing the effectiveness of these classes and making a decision on whether or not to continue them next summer.

Another point to ponder is the venue for next summer's sessions. To date, the lack of facilities and access at the battlefield site has frustrated attempts to conduct programs within park boundaries. Instead, classes have been held in the air-conditioned confines of the park's interim visitor center. By the fall of 2000, however, it is hoped that development will enable the park to provide students with a more extensive and more meaningful range of programs at the scene of the battle of Palo Alto.



## Park Benefits from a Work-Study Program

For much of the Summer, many of the administrative activities of the park proceeded much more smoothly thanks to help provided through a work-study program of the University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC).

Juan Vasquez and Miguel Flores each assisted Palo Alto during the months of June and July, performing a variety of duties that ranged from answering incoming phone calls to filing the many documents produced by a growing park.

The two offered their services as participants in the NPS Volunteer in Parks (VIP) program. They joined the park as part of a cooperative education program operated by the UTB/TSC School of Business. The program encourages students to gain experience in an office environment through volunteer service. Students can also earn college credit for their work.

The arrangement was extremely beneficial to the park. Working up to 20 hours per week, the students provided important operational support for the park. They were also able to conquer a substantial backlog of unfiled documents that had been building up in the office since the exchange of an administrative position for an interpretive ranger. Park Administrative Officer, Oralia Fernandez, served as supervisor for the students.

The park is extremely grateful to UTB/TSC for the co-op program and to Juan and Mike for their participation.

She only arrived in May and she is moving on in August, but

## A Short Stay, But Big Results

Sonia Hernández Leaves Her Mark on Palo Alto

Sonia Hernández has quickly established herself as an important member of the park team.

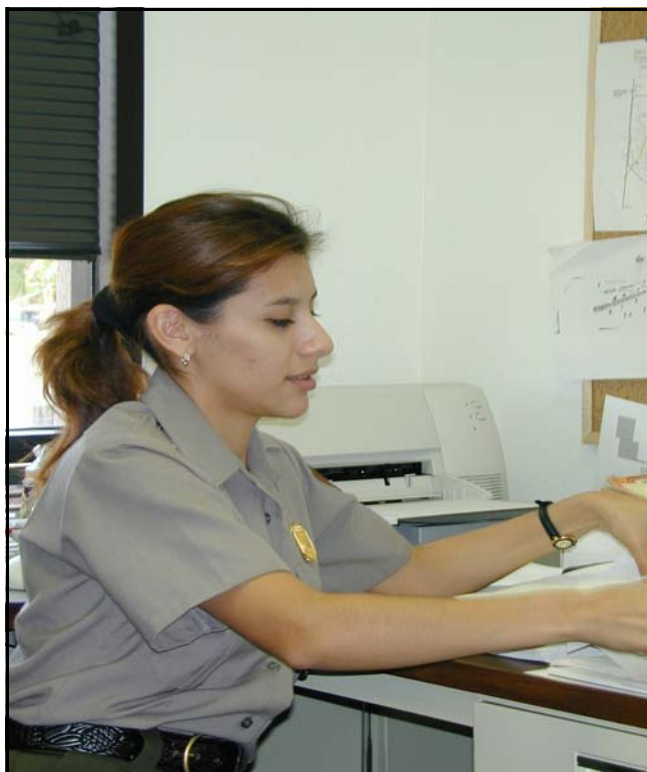
A native of San Juan, Texas and a Master's student in history at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg, Sonia joined the park staff as a participant in the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP)—a program that provides students with an opportunity to work in a professional environment while they pursue their academic interests.

Sonia has worked as a historian in the park's Division of Resource Management, devoting much of her time to editing the *Catalog of Documentary Sources on the*

*War between the U.S. and Mexico: Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and Coahuila*, part of an on-going project to identify local archival holdings in Mexico related to the U.S.-Mexican War. This first volume of the project will be published on CD-ROM by the end of the summer.

Sonia has also played a lead role in updating records of the park's artifact collection and preparing information for the creation of a computerized database.

Unfortunately for the park, Sonia's stay comes to a close at the end of August. She leaves Palo Alto to focus on her graduate studies and to accept a position as a teaching assistant in the history department at the University of Texas-Pan American. The park staff wishes her the best of luck.



Sonia Hernández keeps busy editing the hundreds of document summaries that will make up the *Catalog of Documentary Sources on the War Between the U.S. and Mexico: Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, and Coahuila*.

## A Word From The Superintendent



One of the primary purposes for establishing Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site was to

protect and preserve the historical character and values of the site. By acquiring 456 acres (to date) as per the park's Land Protection Plan, and through the on-going development of scientific studies, we are insuring the protection of the park's valuable historical and natural resources.

The Director of the National Park Service recently announced a bold initiative designed to preserve our country's precious natural heritage for this and generations to come. Director Robert

native species invasions, and air and water pollution have damaged ecosystems and ruined scenic vistas." An action plan is being finalized which will seek to address the major challenges facing the National Park Service in preserving natural resources. It will also outline strategic approaches to be undertaken over the next five years.

Protecting the natural and historical resources of Palo Alto is a commitment and obligation that we all share. What effect will air and water pollution, non-native plant and animal species, existing and proposed transportation plans, industrial development, increase in urban development near the park, etc., have on Palo Alto's resources both within and immediately surrounding the park's boundary? I am confident that we can continue to discuss these issues and develop strategies designed to provide positive economic growth and development opportunities while ensuring a healthy park environ-

ment for current and future generations to come.

I am very pleased with the partnerships that we have established, and the progress that has been made, regarding our efforts to obtain funding for Palo Alto's permanent visitor center and headquarters/visitor contact station to be located at Resaca de la Palma. We want to explore every funding option available in order to construct permanent facilities and expand services to our visitors and community. Also, in the months to come, we hope to install brown (with NPS logo) directional signs at various locations throughout the city in an attempt to direct visitors to Palo Alto. As funding becomes available next fiscal year, it is our desire to acquire additional signs.

In closing, we appreciate and look forward to your continued assistance and support of Palo Alto!

David Vela



Park volunteer Jesse Camarillo completes the installation of wayside exhibits at the end of the park's interpretive trail. The displays provide information about the prairie and battle activities that occurred near this overlook.



The Palo Alto Gazette is a publication of Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site.

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