



Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site
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The Palo Alto Gazette

Standing on Solid Foundations

Park Recieves Additional Funding Support

Palo Alto continues to receive positive responses to its efforts to obtain funding for facilities and services at the park.

In March, the Greater Brownsville Incentives Corporation (GBIC) and the Brownsville Economic Development Council (BEDC) awarded the park \$300,000 over a period of two fiscal years. The funding will be used for the pre-design of the park's permanent visitor center, final design and construction of the Resaca Trail and Overlook.

When combined with a grant from the Houston Endowment in November of 1999, the amount of funds received thus far exceeds over \$800,000.

The park has also forged partnerships with the City of Brownsville, the Brownsville Public Utilities Board, and other organizations that will help provide more than half a million dollars in-kind assistance towards park development.

In response to these partnership efforts, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed a Bill that would provide Palo Alto with the remaining funds required to construct a permanent visitor center and associated facilities at the park. The \$1.8 million funding Bill must now go to a Joint Conference

Committee, be approved by the full Congress, and signed by the President before going into effect. This coalition of partners and funding sources demonstrates the

support and spirit of cooperation that exists in the Rio Grand Valley and throughout the nation for Palo Atlo.

(See GBIC/BEDC, page 5)



An officer of the U.S. Army Second battalion, Eighth Infantry Regiment, Fourth Division, honors the soldiers who fought at the battle of Palo Alto during a May 8, 2000 wreath laying ceremony.

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Local Campuses Assist Park Development

While Palo Alto Battlefield has received funding support from a number of organizations, the park is also relying on important relationships with several local colleges and universities.

Texas State Technical College (TSTC) in Harlingen and the University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC) have both provided valuable support in efforts to develop visitor facilities at Palo Alto.

In May, Mark Knott, Chairman of the Computer Drafting and Design Technology program at TSTC agreed to offer his department's assistance to the park. Since that time, instructor Manuel Villalpando has brought a class of 45 students to the park numerous times, using the battlefield as a laboratory to teach land surveying and computerized mapping.

As the students learn the tools of their trade, they also provide the park with important data about the Palo Alto site. Readings and mapping of the park topography will be used to determine the exact placement of the permanent visitor center, roads, parking areas and trails. Students will also document the location of fence lines, power lines, ranch roads and structures which will offer a valuable record of past development on the battlefield. These maps will also enable the park to move forward with the removal of these intrusions and begin restoring the site to its appearance at the time of the 1846 battle.

Equally important are the contributions of students and faculty from the UTB/TSC College of Science, Mathematics

and Technology. Students of Jaime Garza in the Engineering Drafting and Design program at the University have been practicing their drafting skills by working on designs for a portable kiosk that will serve as an interim visitor contact station at the park. Dr. William Berg is working on plans to provide solar power to the structure. Once plans are completed, students from the Building Trades program will construct the building and help place it on park property. It is also possible that these students will help with the construction of boardwalk trails and overlook structures at the park.

These cooperative efforts have been made possible by a number of supporters at the University, most notably José Martin, Dean of Science, Math and Technology and Jesus

Galvan, Director of the Building Trades Program.

The use of student assistance accomplishes a number of goals for the park. On the most practical level, these projects enable Palo Alto to move forward on projects despite current budget constraints. The support of local colleges also helps the park attract grants and other funding for its projects. Most importantly, however, these partnerships provide local students with an opportunity to learn from and contribute to the development of this National Historic Site. It is hoped that by working with NPS staff, students will take pride in a finished product that they helped to create. It is also desired that this feeling of contribution and "ownership" in the park will help produce a generation of supporters and advocates for the preservation and protection of Palo Alto.



Manuel Villalpando (center, in white), instructor at Texas State Technical College, directs his students during a surveying project on the Palo Alto Battlefield.

Homecoming: The 8th Infantry at Palo Alto

On May 8, 2000, on the 154th anniversary of the battle of Palo Alto, the U.S. Army returned to the prairie.

Some 50 officers of the U.S. Army Second Battalion, Eighth Infantry Regiment, Fourth Division, journeyed from their base at Fort Hood, Texas to visit the Palo Alto battlefield as part of an annual "staff ride."

The staff ride is a common military training exercise in which soldiers study a battle in as much detail as possible, then journey to the scene of the event to place the event into perspective. Staff rides are designed to create



Park Historian Aaron Mahr leads staff ride participants on a tour of the Palo Alto Battlefield.

awareness among modern officers that, despite the advances in strategy, communications, and technology, the importance of military leadership remains paramount.

The staff ride to Palo Alto, however, took on additional meaning since it represented the first occasion that members of the 8th Infantry have returned to the scene of that regiment's baptism of fire. While soldiers of the regiment have distinguished themselves in many battles, and proudly point to their role in the invasion at Normandy in World War II, the 8th Infantry traces its first battle experience to Palo Alto.

Park Historian Aaron Mahr led the officers on a full tour of the park, but interest peaked when the party was able to actually stand on the portion of the battlefield occupied by their 8th Infantry predecessors in 1846.

Following the tour, in a solemn ceremony, the group paid tribute to the soldiers of both the United States and Mexico who served and died at Palo Alto.

Millenium Man: Jesse Camarillo Tallies 2000 Volunteer Hours

He proved himself to be a man of many talents. Now he is an iron man as well. On May 8, 2000, the 154th anniversary of the battle of Palo Alto, Jesse Camarillo eclipsed the 2000 hour mark for volunteer service.

Jesse first volunteered his time to the park in November of 1998. Since that time, he has become an indispensable participant in park operations. He has performed tasks ranging from trash pickup along the park boundary to assisting with visitor services to organizing and supervision of a

major trail rehabilitation project. Now that the park has received \$300,000 in funding from the Greater Brownsville Incentives Corporation and Brownsville Economic Development Council, Jesse has taken on the additional challenge of organizing much of the development activity at the park. In this position, he has played an instrumental role in developing partnerships with local colleges, businesses and organizations.

The service to Palo Alto continues!



Jesse Camarillo puts his love of Palo Alto into his work.

Staff News

Moving In

There's a new ranger in town... and he rides in on a white pick-up truck.

Luis Krug joined the staff of Palo Alto in April, transferring from Padre Island National Seashore to assume responsibility for resource and visitor protection at the park. Luis is a long time veteran of the National Park Service, having accepted his first position as a seasonal interpretive ranger at Fort McHenry National Monument in 1989—eventually becoming a permanent ranger. Following that assignment, he worked in protection at the C&O Canal National Historical Park from 1992 to 1997, before moving to Padre Island.

He brings to Palo Alto a variety of important skills. In addition to a strong background in education and interpretation, Luis is trained as a federal law enforcement officer, a firefighter, and an emergency medical technician—services that are very important as the park expands its operations.

In Brownsville, however, Luis has immediately gained recognition as the man driving the white ranger truck. By conducting regular patrols of the park and its boundaries, Luis not only maintains a vigil against potential resource violation, he has also become a highly visible symbol of the park in the Brownsville community.

Luis has purchased a house in Brownsville and he, his wife and two daughters have begun to settle into their new hometown.

Moving On

He's History!

Aaron Mahr, Supervisory Historian and Chief of Resource Management at Palo Alto will be leaving the park to take on the position of Historian in the NPS Long Distance Trails office in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Aaron has been a member of the park staff since 1993. Since that time, he has been an active participant in many of the efforts to turn Palo Alto into a fully operational unit of the National Park Service. He was an active participant in the process to create a General Management Plan and a Development Concept Plan for the park. He also developed the park's Resource Management Plan and guidelines for artifact curation and library collections.

During the first years of the park, Aaron devoted a great deal of time to searching archives around the nation to locate documents about the battle of Palo Alto and the U.S.-Mexican War. The copies of manuscripts, letters, and reports that he brought to light through this process represent the foundation of Palo Alto's research collection. The materials also provide valuable information to guide park planning and

interpretive activities.

Over the last two years, he has served as the Underground Railroad Program Coordinator for the Intermountain Region of the National Park Service.

Honored

She is the veteran of hundreds of school programs, and now she has a medal to prove it.

On April 6, at a meeting of the Brownsville Independent School District Board of Trustees, Park Ranger Karen Weaver was presented with the medal and a certificate inducting her into the Honorable Order of St. Barbara. The award presented by the U.S. Field Artillery Association recognizes individuals who have contributed in outstanding ways to the promotion of an understanding of field artillery.

Karen received the award for her popular "Canoneers" program. Travelling to schools with a replica foam cannon, Karen has taught thousands of BISD students about artillery and its use on the battlefield.



Karen Weaver accepts the Order of Saint Barbara Medallion from Walter Plitt, who nominated her for the award, Brownsville Mayor Blanca Vela Sanchez, City Commissioner John Wood, and park Superintendent David Vela.

A Word From The Superintendent



David Vela

I am reminded of a favorite quote of mine from Antoine De Saint-Exupery - "A rock pile ceased to be a rock pile the moment a single man

contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral."

Over the past two years, Palo Alto and its partners have been working towards a vision that honors and protects our national heritage while providing educational, tourism, and economic development opportunities for our community.

As you can see from this newsletter, we are well on our way in accomplishing our operational objectives. These accomplishments would not have been possible without the dedicated support of my staff, "Brownsville Palo Alto Initiative" partners, and our community.

The recent actions by the Senate in approving appropriations for the construction of our permanent visitor center is truly a milestone in the park's development. A Senate Aide told me that this would not have been possible without the partnerships that have been established as well as private investments of over \$1,000,000.

Although we have a ways to go on the congressional budget front, I wanted to take this time to thank Mayor Blanca Sanchez Vela and the City Commissioners, Frank and Mary Yturria, and Walter Plitt III for their efforts and discussions with Members of Congress.

Now that we are in a summer recess, I want to thank Karen for the wonderful job that she did for Brownsville ISD students. We are also grateful to the Brownsville ISD Board of Trustees for the naming of their new Support Service Center after the park.

My friends, our vision for Palo Alto is being realized!

GBIC/BEDC (Continued from p. 1)

The financial support provided by GBIC/BEDC and the Houston Endowment have provided a spring board into new partnership arenas. The cooperative arrangements established with local colleges and universities are but a few examples.

Special thanks go to Christine Burton, Chief Executive Officer for the Brownsville Community Foundation for her role as caretaker of grants received and for her administrative support provided to date.

Once Palo Alto constructs visitor facilities and visitation increases, it will have a notable impact on the local economy. It is anticipated that a full year in operation will generate approximately \$8,371,293 in combined sales, \$788,642 in increased tax revenue, and create approximately 335 new jobs. Over a three-year period, \$15,697,249 in total sales, \$1,402,241 in tax revenue, and approximately 628

new jobs could be created in the Brownsville community.

The GBIC/BEDC grant is already producing results. Portions of the grant have been used to complete the pre-design planning for our permanent visitor center. Preparations are also underway to begin construction of a trail and overlook that will provide visitors a view of the battlefield.

The park is also working to design and construct a kiosk which will house park rangers on-site and provide visitors with restroom facilities. The temporary structure will enable the park to maintain a staff presence at the site seven days a week, improving visitor access and resource protection.

It is anticipated that these projects will near completion as early as the close of 2000. Depending on congressional actions on the federal budget, the construction of the new visitor center may begin as early as the

a completion date in 2002.

Discussions have been held recently with government and business leaders with the park's northern neighbors in Los Fresnos. They share the park's vision and look forward to discussing partnership options.



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

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