



# Palo Alto Gazette

## An Earth-Breaking Event: Palo Alto Ceremony Celebrates Community Partnerships

On February 23, 2002, supporters of Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site gathered at the park to celebrate an important milestone in the park's development.

More than 500 people from the Brownsville community attended a ceremonial ground-breaking at the site of the park's future visitor center. The 5,500 square foot facility is in the final planning stages and construction is projected to begin in July of 2002.

**The gathering to turn earth for this facility was a community celebration, recognizing the important local partnerships that helped make the park and visitor center possible.**

The building will contain an exhibit area, education center, audio-visual room, book sales area, restroom facilities, and office space for the park's Visitor Services staff. Exhibits will provide visitors with a view of the causes and consequences of the U.S-Mexican War and of the historical importance of the battle of Palo Alto.

The gathering to turn earth for this facility was a community celebration, recognizing the important local partnerships that helped make the park and visitor center possible. During the hour-long ceremony, Karen Wade, Director of the Intermountain Region of the National Park Service, presented



Supporters of Palo Alto prepared to break ground. Pictured, from left to right: Denise Blanchard, Frank Yturria, Mary Yturria, Dr. Anthony Knopp; Regional Director Karen Wade, Mayor Blanca Sanchez Vela, Yolanda Gonzalez Gomez, Walter Plitt, Mollie Plitt and County Judge Gilberto Hinojosa.

"Shoulder-to-Shoulder Awards" to a number of groups and individuals who have played a vital role in the park's development to date. The award honors those who have joined forces with the National Park Service to help advance the agency's goals of preservation and public understanding of the nation's cultural and natural heritage.

Recipients of Shoulder-to-Shoulder Awards at the Palo Alto ceremony included:

- Walter Plitt, Chairman of the Palo Alto National Park Committee, for his leading role in promoting the preservation of the Palo Alto Battlefield and for his successful efforts to have the site named as a unit of the National Park Service.

- Frank and Mary Yturria, for their support of the park and their successful efforts to help obtain \$1.87 million in public and private funding for the construction of the park's visitor center and other facilities.

- The City of Brownsville for its cooperation with the park on planning projects, maintenance activities, efforts to preserve associated battlefields and sites, and assistance with issues affecting Palo Alto.

- The Brownsville Community Foundation and Chief Executive Officer Christne Burton for assisting the park in its efforts to locate, obtain, and manage grant funding for numerous park activities and construction projects.

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## A Message from the Superintendent

For nearly four years, we have embarked on a journey to obtain funds and build facilities that would be enjoyed by current and future generations to come. A few



David Vela

months ago, we

celebrated this journey

by having a groundbreaking ceremony for the Palo Alto Heritage Center--the park's new visitor center.

The ceremony was truly a community celebration. Folks from all walks of life have given of their time and energy over the years to put "Palo Alto on the map." I was especially pleased to have the National Park Service Intermountain Region Director Karen Wade and Deputy Regional Director Mike Snyder join me in recognizing those who have made this journey possible.

Our design team has informed me that construction of the Heritage Center will begin in July 2002 and will be completed around January 2003. The contractor will also begin construction of the park's sheltered battlefield overlook in a couple of months. The large attendance at the living history encampment and groundbreaking ceremony is a testament of the interest in Palo Alto and a sign of this to come.

It would have been impossible to recognize and thank all of those who have played a role since the park's establishment. It is therefore my hope, that all of those who were present at the ceremony, take pride in what they accomplished and know that future generations will be the ultimate benefactors of their hard work.

# Palo Alto and University Establish Library Partnership

Palo Alto has begun moving hundreds of books and microfilms to the library of the University of Texas at Brownsville as part of a joint project to develop a research collection on the U.S.-Mexican War.

In January, the park signed an agreement with the Arnulfo Olivera Library to house much of Palo Alto's research collection in the Hunter Room--the library's special collections area. The materials will remain the property of the park, but will be cataloged as part of the University's library collection.

The arrangement was established with the understanding that it will create advantages for both organizations. The agreement benefits the park since the materials--which include a number of antique and rare volumes--will be protected in a monitored and climate controlled environment. The library, in turn, will gain access to a wide range of important materials that supplement its existing collections.

Nevertheless, it will be researchers and students of the U.S.-Mexican War who will be the biggest winners in this partnership. In the

past, the Palo Alto Collection has largely been reserved for internal park use and the general public had only limited access. With the transfer of the collection to the Oliveira Library, these items have become available to library patrons on a daily basis.

To date, the park has transferred about half of its library holdings to its new home. The core of this collection consists of approximately 300 volumes from the collection of the Descendants of Mexican War Veterans. These books were donated to the park in the summer of 2001. This organization has promised the donation of additional materials in the future.

Palo Alto hopes that the development of this partnership will inspire other individuals and groups to follow the lead of the Descendants of Mexican War Veterans and donate books, manuscripts and war related items to the park so that it may include them in this research collection. In time, the goal is to develop the Palo Alto Collection into an important research center for the U.S.-Mexican War and to manage this center through a lasting partnership between the park and the University.



Participants in Palo Alto's Living History Days take a break after a full day of school programs.

# Park Comes Alive With History and Visitors

For two days in February, history returned to Palo Alto.

Palo Alto Battlefield's "Living History Days," on February 22-23, included more than 30 participants and permitted a crowd of more than 1500 visitors to the park to get a taste of the life of a soldier during the time of the U.S.--Mexican War.

The event was designed to introduce the Brownsville community to the park. Although the park continues to develop, it has limited activities and hours at the battlefield site. The weekend event helped draw visitors out to the battlefield and provided them with an opportunity to learn about the site in an entertaining and thought-provoking manner. Those who came to see the living history program were also invited to the park's ground breaking ceremony, giving them a glimpse of the future of the site.

The program also aimed to provide visitors with a clearer understanding of what it was



Students learn about cooking in camp during a school session at the living history encampment

like to serve in the army in 1846. The gathering was not a reenactment of a battle, but a portrayal of camp life in the long intervals between clashes. With a period camp as the centerpiece of their presentation, living history participants provided demonstrations of cooking, artillery techniques, musketry, cavalry maneuvers, and marching drills. The setting also encouraged interaction between the participants and visitors.

The program drew more than 800 students during the designated "School Day" on Friday and an additional 800 visitors on Saturday, when the camp was open to the general public.

The success of the event can be attributed to the quality of the presentations provided by the participating living history organizations. The groups: Co. A, 7th Regiment U.S. Infantry Living History Association, Company A, 5th Regiment, U.S. Infantry, Company A, 2nd Regiment U.S. Artillery, Southwest Frontiers Mounted Ranging Company, and the Alamo Legacy Missions Association, are the most professional and accurate organizations that interpret this era of U.S. and Mexican military history.

Because of the distances travelled by many of the living history participants, this type of event is not likely to become an annual occurrence. However, Palo Alto does expect to provide other smaller programs and hopes to host another major gathering in several years.



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site preserves the location of the May 8, 1846 battle of Palo Alto--the first major clash of the U.S.-Mexican War. The park interprets the battle of Palo Alto, associated battles on the Rio Grande, and the entire war with its broad range of causes and consequences.

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

## Many Thanks

The Living History and groundbreaking events would not have been possible without the generous and enthusiastic support of our friends and partners. Palo Alto would like to take this opportunity to thank some of the people and organizations that helped make both occasions a success.

Walter & Molly Plitt

Richard and Christine Burton

Larry Brown

David Solis

Arturo Farias

Roberto Hernandez

David Ivory

Baldomero Camarillo

Elias Peña

Palo Alto National Park Committee

Lone Star National Bank

Titan Tire Corporation

Brownsville Downtown Lions Club

Brownsville Kiwanis Club

Brownsville Police Department

City of Brownsville Green Division

Texas Army National Guard--Weslaco

Carroll County Constable, Precinct 2

Girl Scouts of America,,Tip of Texas Council, Troops 11, 85, 101, 108, 239, 351, and 367

Boy Scouts of America, Rio Grande Council,, Troops 1, 11, and 61

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

Frank & Mary Yturria

Denise Blanchard

Danny Forbis

Carlos Ayala

Jose Gavito

Robert Garcia

Patty Alexander

Raul Llamas

HEB Food Stores

U.S. Army Reserve-Harlingen

U.S. Consul--Matamoros

Office of Congressman Soloman Ortiz

Brownsville Community Foundation

Brownsville Fire Department

U.S. Border Patrol

City of Brownsville Parks and Recreation

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Brownsville H.O.P.E



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U.S. Department of the Interior  
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## Staff Coming and Going

Palo Alto is pleased to announce the arrival of a new addition to the staff and says farewell to another member who is departing for another opportunity.

Carol Gonzalez arrived in February as a student trainee Office Automation Assistant. She will help the park's Administrative Officer, Oralia Fernandez, to manage the budget, payroll, property, and the many other day-to-day functions involved in operating the park.

Luis Krug, the park's Chief of Protection and Natural Resource Management has announced that he is leaving Palo Alto after two years to join the staff of Chickasaw National Recreation Area in Oklahoma. Luis will head north to begin his new duties in mid-May.

## Palo Alto Ceremony Recognizes Partnerships

(continued from page 1)

In addition to these awards, Mike Snyder, Deputy Regional Director of the NPS Intermountain Region, recognized the Houston Endowment, the Greater Brownsville Incentives Corporation (GBIC) and Brownsville Economic Development Council (BEDC) for providing funding and overall support for the park. The Houston Endowment awarded \$500,000 in funding for the construction of the park visitor center while the GBIC/BEDC provided \$300,000 for a park trail, battlefield overlook, and pre-design of the visitor center .

Superintendent David Vela then presented plaques of appreciation to additional park partners: Irv Downing of GBIC, Marie McDermott of BEDC, Molly Plitt of Brownsville, and Larry Brown, Carlos Ayala, Mark Lund, and Patty Alexander of the City of Brownsville.

The highlight of the event, however, was the groundbreaking itself. Following the award presentations, the honored guests, Blanca Sanchez Vela, Mayor of Brownsville, and other representatives of the Brownsville, Texas/Matamoros, Mexico community assembled at the spot designated for the future Palo Alto Heritage Center. With gold-plated shovels in hand, the group dug into the earth to the resounding applause of the audience.

The ceremonial groundbreaking represented a significant step in the park's development for participants and observers alike. Many of those in attendance have worked for decades to see the battlefield designated as a national park, and the plans to construct a visitor facility represent an additional fulfillment of a longstanding dream.