

Diversified & in-demand: South Texas EDCs advocate for community, region

BY BRANDI SMITH



South Texas is a region as diverse in industry as the people who make up its population. Stretching from San Antonio to Brownsville and Corpus Christi to Del Rio, South Texas encompasses nearly 30 counties, covers roughly 37,800 square miles and is home to millions.

“The movement to South Texas is happening faster than the developers can keep up,” says Gene Lindgren, President and CEO of the Laredo Economic Development Corporation.

He notes that Laredo is catching up by developing thousands of acres in first-class industrial parks. But commercial development overall is booming. In 2021, Lindgren says Laredo issued \$543 million in new construction permits, \$55 million of that in the commercial space.

“What is happening now is a significant jump due to the impact of global supply chain issues and companies deciding they need to be in North America as opposed to Asia,” says Lindgren. “The near-shoring dynamic already has our daily truck numbers up with some days hitting projections for 2030.”



Dr. Jim Lee - Corpus Christi



Gene Lindgren - Laredo



Dustin Morris - Cibolo

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Port Laredo averages 17,000 truck crossings per day.

“We promote our port with site selectors, trade-show exhibits, collaboration with national banking institutions, advertise in traditional and social media outlets, and host our annual Pathways for Trade Symposium,” Lindgren says. “Last year’s event was our 28th and we had presentations from the port directors of Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, New Orleans, and of course, Laredo. We are a Top 5 port and this annual event put us on the same stage with those other trade powerhouses.”

It gets some competition from the Port of Corpus Christi, which is the largest crude oil exporter in the U.S.

“The key economic driver for South Texas historically is oil and gas, and industries that are directly tied to oil and gas resources,” says Dr. Jim Lee, Regents Professor of Economics at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC). “While the oil and gas industry is exposed to erratic wings over time, from a historic low during the onset of the pandemic in early 2020 to a nearly historic high today, industries that rely heavily on energy consumption, such as steel and plastic plants, have continued to take the logistical advantage of the port infrastructure in Corpus Christi.”

Dr. Lee says a diverse group of economic development agencies works collaboratively to benefit the Corpus Christi Community. The Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Corporation focuses on attracting capital investments for new manufacturers, while Coastal Bend Workforce Solutions works alongside Del Mar Community College to provide workforce training. The South Texas Economic Development Center at TAMU-CC, headed by Dr. Lee, provides data analytics to support local business and capital investment decision making.

That data suggests to him that demand for commercial space will shift from large, expensive sites to smaller, less expensive cities, such as Corpus Christi.

“Despite a roughly 15 percent increase in the median home price during the past year, Corpus Christi’s housing market is still remarkably affordable in comparison with Austin and Dallas,” says Dr. Lee. “The commercial real estate here still has a lot of slack, making this mid-sized city especially attractive to businesses and employees. The area’s open space, waterfront and beaches will play a larger role for years to come.”

Along with marketing their communities, South Texas EDCs are also focused on building long-lasting relationships with new and current business partners, says Dustin Morris, the Interim Director of Economic Development for the City of Cibolo, located just outside of San Antonio.

“The city offers a variety of incentives, depending on the business, and we remain vigilant and responsive to issues facing our community; either economic, social, or otherwise,” Morris says.

As with so many other cities in South Texas, Cibolo’s key geographic location is immensely appealing for developers and investors.

“The city and the Cibolo EDC are constantly working on a shared vision of developing the I-10 corridor into a manufacturing hub. Now that utilities are more accessible along this corridor, the Economic Development department is actively marketing the potential of this corridor for manufacturing,” shares Morris.

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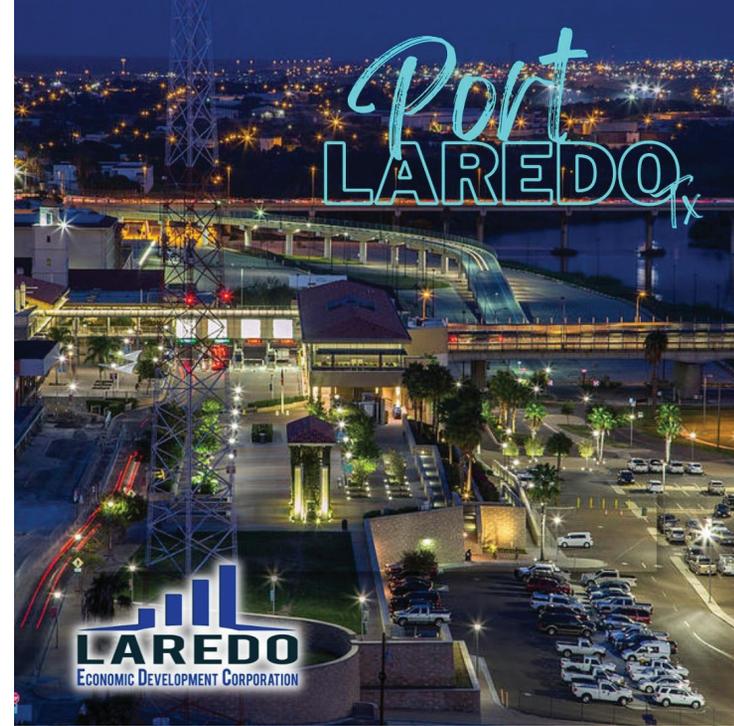
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Corpus Christi



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South Texas

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Neighboring San Antonio is also targeting manufacturers, adding to what is one of the region’s most strongly established industries.

“San Antonio has targeted advanced manufacturing for clustered development around automotive, food & beverage, and aerospace,” says Sarah Carabias-Rush, Chief Economic Development Officer for greater:SATX Regional Economic Partnership.

Within the past 20 years, Carabias-Rush says San Antonio has continued to develop and hone its automotive manufacturing expertise and has seen that pay tremendous dividends. In 2002, Toyota’s investment in a manufacturing facility “planted the seed” for San Antonio’s automotive manufacturing cluster, she says.

“Toyota employs more than 7,000 San Antonians today directly and through its on-site supplier network. Toyota’s most recent investment in San Antonio, announced in 2019, is projected to have a \$10 billion economic impact over the next 10 years,” Carabias-Rush says. “Toyota’s continued investment in San Antonio and the development of a regional supplier network has attracted others to the regional corridor including Navistar, Tesla, and soon DeLorean.”

She believes one of the most important factors for companies to choose San Antonio is its people.

“In recent years, the region has made an unprecedented investment in developing our people and place to continue attracting jobs within our target growth industries. The greater San Antonio region has a rapidly growing talent base that is ready to work,” says Carabias-Rush. “When companies look to the San Antonio area, they can feel the welcoming spirit and a ‘hunger’ to win — and help newcomers to thrive.”

While there are plenty of newcomers, not just to San Antonio, but to South Texas as a whole. As the EDCs in the region continue their quest to market their communities, incentivize development, generate a workforce and support industry, there will be many more in the years to come.