

Making it big in

# M C A L L E N

## Why the South Texas City is booming

McALLEN SKYLINE



BY BRANDI SMITH

Nestled on the Texas side of the southern U.S. border with Mexico, what is now the state's fifth-largest city is in the midst of a development boom. McAllen, often (and mistakenly) labeled a typical border town, was recently named one of the Top 10 Biggest Boomtowns in America by Magnify Money. A review of the city's population, earnings and business growth led CNBC to rank McAllen No. 1 for cities with rising salaries.

"McAllen is a powerhouse fueled by international trade, medical tourism, retail and higher education," says Rebecca Olaguibel, the city's director of retail and business development. "As a matter of fact, McAllen generates more than \$3 billion in gross retail sales tax for the state of Texas every year."

One element of the city's success is its visiting population of 39,000 people every day.

"Because of the influx of visitors from across the region, from both sides of the border, I call McAllen a geographic jackpot," says Olaguibel.

The city owns and operates two international bridges with over 4 million northbound travelers a year. Additionally, roughly 700,000 travelers utilize the McAllen-Miller International Airport annually. Combine all that with an international bus terminal and it's easy to see how those visitor numbers add up to a whopping 18 million a year. "Beyond the daily influx of visitors, we have a thriving Winter Texan season between October and February," Olaguibel adds. "Retirees from the midwest love to winter in McAllen because of our mild winter climate, low cost of living, and hospitality; it makes for an interesting cultural experience."

The city boasts more than 700 restaurants, ranging from Japanese, Peruvian, and Italian every style of Mexican including regional Tex-Mex. The choices also range from local flavors offerings the taste of South Texas, to impressive destination restaurants like Buddy V's, Carlo's Bakery, Texas de Brazil and Yard House.



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# McALLEN

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**PALMS CROSSINGS**



**REBECCA OLAGUIBEL**  
Director of Retail and  
Business Development

McAllen is also a hub for retail and entertainment development. Topgolf will build its 11th Texas location in the area, adding 500 new jobs to the McAllen market.

"They'll bring in their opening teams, top administrative staff and operations team from outside of the market

and have them relocate here either permanently or temporarily," explains Olaguibel. "We experienced the same moves by Dave & Buster's last year."

The woman who just might be McAllen's biggest development champion moved to the city 11 years ago.

"It's been an amazing journey," Olaguibel says. "I've learned so much about McAllen, including many unique attributes to the city. There is an intriguing historical and cultural side of McAllen, in addition to the quality of life elements and diverse industries. It really is an amazing city."

An example of that can be found in the Tres Lagos development, which is currently under construction. When it's complete, it will feature an estimated 5,000 single-family homes, 1,000 townhouses, 2,000 multi-family units and 1.5 million square feet of retail space.

"Part of the vision behind Tres Lagos was to expand McAllen's footprint to the north. We wanted to make sure that we had growth opportunities for our city, so we worked with a private developer, annexed the land into the city of McAllen and collaborated with the developer to create a city within the city at Tres Lagos," says Olaguibel.

Already, Tres Lagos is home to Texas A&M's Higher Education Center. Initial enrollment this fall was expected to be around 50, but more than 200 people signed up for classes. That simply adds to the area's educational options, which include University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and South Texas College.

"This is a point of pride for us because, in the past, our high school graduates left the area, heading to San Antonio, Houston, Dallas or beyond," Olaguibel explains. "Now with the opportunities we have here in higher education, they can stay close to home and have an incredible opportunity for quality higher education. We're really proud to offer this option because we feel our kids will power McAllen's future."

Other projects in the area include Simon's La Plaza redevelopment, which featured a 250,000 square foot expansion along with two parking garages, new restaurants and new tenants. The Shops at 29 offer 200,000 square feet of new retail space with anchor tenants such as Dave & Busters, Burlington and Ulta. Now in phase 3, the Palms Crossing shopping center continues to add new options.

around the convention center," Olaguibel adds. She says the city, as part of its strategic plan, wants to offer the best quality-of-life experiences it can, including cultural events and experiences.

"Our City wants to ensure that we provide the best experience for people who live and work in McAllen, in addition to the 39,000 people who visit us every day," says Olaguibel. "We want to make sure that when you enter McAllen city limits, you know you are in a very special place."

McAllen's growth and successes are propelling it to achieve more, led by city management and elected officials who are pro-business.

"That's been our goal and we've worked really hard toward creating amazing experiences and providing



**PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**

"We're a well-rounded family friendly city, deep in south Texas," adds Olaguibel.

The McAllen Convention Center, which books about 300 events a year, draws people from at least a 200-mile radius, says Olaguibel. The property includes the McAllen Performing Arts Center, host of the Broadway series.

"It's a truly walkable district where you can enjoy yourself. There are great restaurants and high-end hotels all

the best quality of life for our citizens and guests," Olaguibel says. "And we're not stopping. We've really just started and we're excited for what's next."

That means there's an open door for developers with the right ideas.

Says Olaguibel: "McAllen is a place where they can make an investment, knowing the return on their investment will exceed expectations." ■