

# THE MONITOR

SUNDAY, MAY 24, 2015 SERVING THE RIO HUANUCAN VALLEY \$1.50 SUNDAYS

**Holiday hours**  
The Monitor's offices will be closed Monday, May 25, but the customer service call center will be open from 6 to 10 a.m.

**Growing interest in festival**  
New fans attend Alamo's Watermelon Fest. **Page 1B | Valley & State**

**Queens of the kicks**  
Our picks for the best of girls' soccer. **Pages 1C-2C | SportsDay**

**NATIONAL PUBLIC WORKS WEEK FESTIVAL**  
"Community Begins Here"  
**Saturday, May 30th**  
4101 N. Benito Rd.  
8am-1pm  
[www.cityofmcallen.com](http://www.cityofmcallen.com)

## A hard harvest

Starr County gardener looks to legal path for peyote patches

BY KRISTEN MOSBRUCKER  
STAFF WRITER

San Juanita Garcia pushed back her long brown hair under a wide-brimmed hat as she pulled on tall pink leather cowgirl boots before heading out in the Starr County brush. The 51-year-old gardener was on the prowl for fresh cacti in the hot sun.

"If you see a rattlesnake, stand very still — then run away," Garcia cautioned. "It's mating season for snakes; be very careful."

As she poked around a prickly pear cactus, rattlesnake skin lay on the ground nearby as she scooped out barrel cactus, "lady-finger" cactus, and even tried to uproot a full-grown yucca. Garcia runs a cactus and petri-fied wood garden business and often visits her hometown to collect raw materials, but there's one cactus she can't touch right now — peyote.

"On a semi-hill, on the bottom, under prickly pear — that's where you'll find it," she said about where the small button-like cactus tends to grow, deep in the spiny thickets.

Difficult access to the potential cash-crop can be a problem

At left, San Juanita Garcia looks for peyote, seen above, in some cacti on her ranch in Roma. Peyote is a small, spineless cactus used in Native American religious ceremonies.

Photos by Kristen Mosbrucker | [mosbrucker@themonitor.com](mailto:mosbrucker@themonitor.com)

See PEYOTE | 8A

## Postal worker case under review

Prosecutors examine whether Mission postmen conspired to sell mail-in ballots

BY KRISTIAN HERNANDEZ  
STAFF WRITER

McALLEN — The case of two Mission postal workers facing an investigation into whether they sold mail-in ballots during the last La Jolla school district board election was recently turned over to federal prosecutors for review.

The case focuses on whether the postmen conspired to sell lists of voters receiving mail-in ballots to candidates running in the November elections, including Hidalgo County Sheriff Eddie Guerra, who denies involvement with the men.

The U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General launched an investigation into the postal employees that month, when agents received a video showing the workers negotiating a

See CASE | 12A

## Services director: I'm responsible for slipup

Texas, other states call for monitoring of government

BY EMMA PEREZ-THREIN  
STAFF WRITER

HARLINGEN — The director of the country's immigration services took responsibility for benefits that were issued for undocumented immigrants after a federal judge suspended immigration initiatives by President Barack Obama's administration, public records show.

"As the director of USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Service), I accept full responsibility for the failure to effectively halt the issuance ... of the benefits," Director Leon Rodriguez stated in declarations that government attorneys presented to U.S. District Judge Andrew S. Hanen recently.

The declarations also noted that human error caused the issuances, and that steps had been immediately taken to reverse the actions.

This comes amid Hanen's recent finding that the government misled him regarding the date

See LAWSUIT | 12A

## GED testing changes keep many from passing, Harlingen official says

Literacy director: Administering exam on computers also a problem for participants

BY TRAVIS M. WHITEHEAD  
STAFF WRITER

HARLINGEN — Changes in the GED test have made it more difficult to pass, or more challenging, depending on whom you ask.

The new GED test took effect in January 2014. Since that time, the passing rate has dropped 30 percent, said Linda Kiewert, executive director of the Harlingen Literacy Center at 101 E. Monroe Ave.

When the test was changed in 2002 it had five sections: writing skills, interpreting literature and the arts, social studies, science and mathematics. It now has four sections: science, social studies, mathematical reasoning and "reasoning through language arts."

Kiewert said more than half of the math section is made up of algebra. The previous test only had a little algebra.

According to Linda Kiewert, director of the Harlingen Literacy Center, recent changes to the GED testing requirements have left many unable to pass the exam.

David Pike | Valley Morning Star

See GED | 7A

Looking for a new vehicle? **Think Bert Ogden**

MISSION - McALLEN EDINBURG - HARLINGEN

[WWW.BERTOGDEN.COM](http://WWW.BERTOGDEN.COM)

6 38091 00007 6

An ARM Media Times Newspaper Vol. 106, No. 301 72 Pages, 9 Sections

