

# Laredo Morning Times

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A HEARST NEWSPAPER



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3-1-1 | ASSISTANCE

## Taxpayers get help line

By **ASHLEY RICHARDS**  
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

A customer service hotline is now available to Webb County and City of Laredo residents for answers to questions about any services provided by the two entities.

Residents can call 3-1-1 seven days a week between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m. where “one call will do it all.” The services began last week, and the city and county announced the opening of the new call center Monday.

“We talk about customer service and we talk about transparency in government and we talk about being there,” said Pct. 3 Commissioner Jerry Garza, who spearheaded the creation of a call center in 2005. “Well, what better way to be there for the con-

stituents than for somebody to have access to their government seven days a week from seven in the morning to 11 o'clock at night? That is true customer service.”

Garza learned of 3-1-1 services when a constituent spoke about it at a town hall meeting about two years ago. Since then, he and the Webb County Commissioners Court have been working with the City Council and city staff to bring it to fruition.

Callers can dial 3-1-1 (or 721-2480 for areas and cellular phone providers that do not have access yet to 3-1-1) for an information request, such as determining which precinct someone lives in, or for a service request, such as requesting pothole repair.

See 3-1-1 | PAGE 11A

### 3-1-1 | Continued from Page 1B

Demonstrating the array of uses for 3-1-1, District VII Councilman Juan Chavez told to the crowd at the announcement ceremony: “I don’t have a speech but I do have questions for you.

“Does anybody know the number where I should call to report a stray animal?”

“3-1-1,” the crowd responded.

“What about to report an abandoned car?” Chavez said.

“3-1-1,” everyone answered.

When a citizen calls the line for a service request, the caller is given a tracking number so they may call back to check up on the status. Depending on the service request, citizens will be given an estimated time frame for completion of the request.

City and county officials praised each other for working together on the initiative, as its completion was a campaign promise many of them had made.

“When you have city employees using county offices, that’s what it’s all about,” said County

Judge Danny Valdez. “And this is just the beginning.”

Mayor Raul Salinas said, “(The) No. 1 priority is to serve the needs of the citizens of the county and the City of Laredo. We’re going to continue the partnership.”

District I Councilman Mike Garza said the campaign promises were not just words, and that the launch of 3-1-1 is an example of the city and county working well together.

“It’s a great burden, but we know that you will fulfill that commitment,” Garza said to the staff who will man the 3-1-1 phone lines.

The headquarters are located at 1200 Washington St. in the old Tex-Mex Building. The city and county plan to expand the program in the future by adding more call-takers as the number of calls increase.

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