

UTPA's CHAPS puts history in the hands of archeology fair visitors

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A group of faculty, staff and students from The University of Texas-Pan American provided more than 500 South Texans a chance to get a hands-on glimpse of their region's rich cultural and natural history Oct. 13.



CHAPS coordinator and UTPA graduate student Roseann Bacha-Garza (far left) and UTPA student volunteers Norma Garza and Chris Scott showed visitors how to track their families' histories during the archeology fair.

The contingent from UTPA's Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools (CHAPS) manned one of 20 booths at the 6th Annual Rio Grande Delta International Archeology Fair at the Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Park in Brownsville.

The fair is presented each year at the battlefield - the location of the first battle of the Mexican-American War in 1846 - to encourage visitors to learn more about the science of archeology and the region's archeological resources.

Approximately 20 professional archeologists from the United States and Mexico shared their knowledge and provided demonstrations, displays and activities at the event.

"The fair is designed to instill in the visitor a sense of shared stewardship and bring awareness for the need of resource preservation," said Rolando L. Garza, archeologist and chief of Resource Management at the Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Park.

Faculty members and archeologists Dr. Russell Skowronek, Dr. Juan Gonzalez, and Bobbie Lovett were joined by CHAPS coordinator and graduate student Roseann Bacha-Garza, graduate student in interdisciplinary studies Daniel Nicholson and other undergraduate and graduate students, many of whom are members of UTPA's Anthropology Club, to interact with fair goers.



CHAPS graduate assistant Maria Vallejo (left) helped fair goers with identifying historic ceramics at the CHAPS booth during the 6th Annual Rio Grande Delta International Archeology Fair held Oct. 13 at the Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Park in Brownsville.

The group presented a three-part project for fair visitors, which included a look at Hidalgo County land grant maps and guidance on preparing a family tree, a display of historic ceramics and how to categorize them by type, and a prehistoric table, where participants could examine and handle projectile points of the area and play a "match the projectile points" game.

"Our tables were never idle and the students did a great job. I found it interesting that we had quite a few adults participate in our projects this year," said Lovett. "I hope the fair visitors came to the realization that the Valley has a long history, and that we still have a lot to learn about it, and that it is possible with the involvement of local communities."

Initiated in 2009 at UTPA, CHAPS seeks to create archaeologically and historically literate citizens who are aware of their local cultural and natural history and its importance to the future economic development of the Rio Grande Valley.

A \$100,000 grant to CHAPS from the National Endowment for the Humanities has supported professional development and training for K-12 teachers and other activities, including an interdisciplinary class for graduate and undergraduate students where they engage in research with UTPA faculty members in the areas of archaeology, anthropology, biology, geology and research to record histories of Valley properties and families. Their findings are then published

and made available to the community. The students' first project initiated in Fall 2011 resulted in an extensive history compiled on the noted Edinburg family of Carrol Norquest Jr.

Garza said CHAPS has had a presence at the fair since 2010 and described their participation as a "Godsend" to the festival.

"CHAPS has become an integral part of the yearly fair. They have a cast of professional archeologists and students who bring a spark of enthusiasm to the fair. They have displays, demonstrations and activities that introduce the visitor to the realm of prehistoric lithic technologies, the use of social science in archeology, genealogy, and historic archeology of the Lower Rio Grande Valley," he said.