



Merry Christmas!

THE MONITOR

WHAT'S INSIDE

- View highlights from 2016 editorial cartoons by our artist. **Pages 6B-7B | Opinion**
- Sister Pimentel embraces role in work at respite center. **Page 1D | vidadSunday**



High standards
McAllen's Casas has sights on state, more.
Page 1C | SportsDay

Holiday hours
The Monitor's offices will be closed today but the customer service call center will be open from 7 to 10 a.m.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2016

SERVING THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY SINCE 1909

\$1.50 ON SUNDAYS



Miguel Roberts | The Brownsville Herald

A historical Civil War trail marker is seen Friday along University Boulevard in Brownsville. The project was spearheaded by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Community Historical Archeology

Signs of war

New tour historical markers add focus to history

BY FRANK GARZA
AND PAMELA CODY
STAFF WRITERS

BROWNSVILLE — Texas — and the Rio Grande Valley especially — often get excluded from retellings of Civil War history.

In states such as Virginia, Maryland, Arkansas and Missouri, tourists can find a Civil War trail marking the areas where a battle had occurred. Until recently, no such trail existed in the Valley, where the last battle of the Civil War was fought. Spearheaded by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Community Historical Archeology Project with Schools Program, local scholars were not only able to put together a virtual guide for a local trail, but print a map and erect historical markers in Brownsville.

"We had an opportunity to do something ourselves, which is not only good for education, but also good for the entrepreneurs and community development," said Russell Skowronek, director of the CHAPS program. "A lot of people come for birds and butterflies ... but why not deliver heritage tourism, the other side of the coin?"

The RGV Civil War Trail is an ongoing project, and for a while, ideas exploring the topic went nowhere, Skowronek said.

When the CHAPS program received seed money in 2014, Skowronek decided to start contacting people.

"We called people from Brownsville all the way to Laredo," Skowronek said. "We contacted some Civil War scholars — some in state, and others out of state — and we brought everybody together."

Skowronek only asked his colleagues for one thing: a one-page synopsis of why the site was important.

MY monitor
news.com

Learn more about the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Community Historical Archeology Project.



MARKERS

From Page 1A

The fruits of their labor can be seen at <http://www.utrgv.edu/civilwar-trail/>, with podcasts in English and in Spanish.

"The trail is in my mind and in the mind of my colleagues how heritage tourism regionally can benefit everyone in the region," Skowronek said. "And the Civil War trail is what I hope will be the first expression of a heritage corridor."

So far, 14 new highway and street signs mark the trail in Brownsville, with several located on the UTRGV and Texas Southmost College campuses.

Roseann Garza, program manager of CHAPS, explained the area's role in the Civil War.

"Though it was a very quiet region, it provided a lot of economic importance because of trade along the river of cotton and other materials," Garza said. "The Union was blockading that, so



Miguel Roberts | The Brownsville Herald

A historical Civil War trail marker is seen Friday along University Boulevard in Brownsville. The project was spearheaded by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Community Historical Archeology Project.

this is where the Confederates were funding their cause through trade, from the Rio Grande out into the Gulf to different countries."

Areas of significance in-

cluded the trading town of Baghdad in Mexico, bustling with trade and commerce, and the land on Highway 4 on the way to Boca Chica Beach, where soldiers would come and

get ready for battle.

"There was a lot of movement of goods in addition to cotton, such as medicine, guns and ammunition," Roseann added.

The CHAPS program partners include the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and more recently the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation.

For their efforts in documenting the 200-mile long trail, the CHAPS program will be receiving the Daniel G. Roberts Award for Excellence in Public Historical Archeology from the Society for Historical Archeology, Skowronek said.

They have also gotten recognition from the Texas Historical Commission.

"This was a grassroots movement from people who recognized the importance of history and heritage in our region. We turned something from being virtual to the real deal, and I am really pleased about that," Skowronek said.

Skowronek agrees that while not many people may have died in Texas compared to other states,

it still played a significant role in the conflict.

"When the rest of the Confederacy had been strangled by the U.S. Navy, the one place they kept getting cash was the Rio Grande Valley," Skowronek said. "The bullets may have been fired in Virginia, but the money for those materials and everything else came through the funnel of Mexico and Texas."

That raises an important question, one which the professor and his colleagues have yet to find an answer for.

"When you figure that Galveston was the last port to fall other than the Rio Grande, if the Union had been able to control it, would the war have ended in 1864?" Skowronek said. "If it had, more than 100,000 lives would have been saved."

fgarza@brownsvilleherald.com

pcody@brownsvilleherald.com