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UTRGV's CHAPS program receives Texas Historical Commission's award

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

UTRGV's Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools program continues to make a lasting mark in preserving Rio Grande Valley history with its recent 2020 Governor's Award for Historic Preservation, presented by the Texas Historical Commission.

The prestigious Governor's Award goes to organizations or individuals for their efforts in preserving Texas' cultural and historical resources and recognizes the highest achievement in heritage preservation.

CHAPS, a community engagement program founded in 2009, has worked on several projects and documentaries that showcase the hidden history of the Valley. The group also has focused on creating educational material for K-12 educators with its "Traveling Trunk" exhibits.

UTRGV faculty, lecturers, and staff — who volunteer their time and share a passion for showcasing the Valley's history — make up the CHAPS team.

>> Roseann Bacha-Garza, MA, CHAPS project manager, UTRGV part-time lecturer.

>> Dr. Walter Diaz, Ph.D., dean, College of Liberal Arts.

>> Dr. Juan L. Gonzalez, Ph.D., CHAPS co-director, UTRGV associate professor of geology.

>> Dr. Christopher L. Miller, Ph.D., CHAPS co-director, UTRGV professor



Courtesy photo

UTRGV Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools (CHAPS) hosts the "Just a Ferry Ride to Freedom" documentary premiere in February 2019.

of history.

>> Dr. Russell K. Skowronek, Ph.D., CHAPS founding director, UTRGV professor of history and anthropology.

Skowronek said the team is extremely honored to have earned this award. Their mission is simple, he said. Tell the community's stories and capture the history of the region.

"The goal of the CHAPS program is to make people feel proud about where they're from, to know more about their roots. And most of all, to celebrate those roots," Skowronek said. "The governor's seal of approval is a stamp that says this program is really, truly a star accomplishment for UTRGV."

Community engagement is the core of all CHAPS initiatives, Skowronek said, and the feedback on their efforts has been encouraging.

The CHAPS documentary "And Then the Sol-

diers Were Gone" earned a Bronze Telly Award in 2019. The work focused on the history of Fort Ringgold, the former military base in Rio Grande City, and the impact on the city when the fort closed.

CHAPS also shared previously uncovered research about the underground railroad in the Valley, highlighted in the documentary "Just a Ferry Ride to Freedom."

Several traveling museum exhibits created by CHAPS remain on display, such as "War and Peace on the Rio Grande (1861-1867)" at the Mission Historical Museum and "Discovering Fort Brown" at the Weslaco Museum.

CHAPS also has an ongoing class project, in which students help put together books about the farming families in Edinburg.

All CHAPS projects are about historical preservation and provide insight into the past.