



150 MILES: HEALTH IN THE BORDERLANDS

April 7, 2022 | 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (CST)

Speaker Bio's



Deborah Zuloaga, President & CEO, [United Way of El Paso County](#)

Deborah A. Zuloaga is a native El Pasoan and graduate of North Texas State University. Since 2003, Ms. Zuloaga has served as President and Chief Executive Officer of the United Way of El Paso County. Ms. Zuloaga previously served as the United Way of El Paso County's Associate Director and Resource Development Director.

Ms. Zuloaga was also Executive Director, Girl Scouts of the Rio Grande; Special Events Coordinator of a Hispanic grassroots presidential campaign effort, VIVA '84; Deputy Associate Director of Presidential Personnel, The White House; and Director, Federal Advisory Committee

Office, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Ms. Zuloaga currently serves as a member of the Texas Prepaid Higher Education Tuition Board and the Texas Center for Legal Ethics Board of Trustees. She is also a member of the United Way Worldwide Membership Accountability Committee and serves on two advisory boards for the City of El Paso – Parks and Recreation and Greater El Paso Civic, Convention, and Tourism. Ms. Zuloaga also served as Chair of Leadership El Paso and a director of The Texas Lyceum. In 2019, El Paso Inc. honored Ms. Zuloaga as one of six Women of Impact and she was the 2021 recipient of Children at Risk's award for Outstanding Child Advocate - West Texas.



Commissioner David Stout, [El Paso County Commissioner, Precinct Two](#)

David Stout was sworn in as El Paso County Commissioner for Precinct 2 on January 1, 2015. Prior to working for the County, he worked as a Bilingual Communications Specialist and Binational Affairs Liaison for Texas State Senator, Jose Rodriguez. Stout also worked in the communications field for the United States Conference

of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C., and has close to a decade of experience in broadcast journalism, having worked with NBC, Telemundo and Univision. Though David is originally from Wyoming, he fell in love with the El Paso area after spending a semester in the borderland as part of the Master's Degree in Latin American Studies he received from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. He always wanted to come back to this amazing community, and was finally afforded the opportunity to do so in 2010, as he took a job as a News Reporter with Noticias 26 Univision.

Though Stout never envisioned himself becoming an elected official when he came to El Paso, public service and giving back to his community have been part of his life as long as he can remember. Whether it was planting trees in a burned forest, picking up trash on the side of the road or preparing and delivering meals on wheels to the elderly, his parents instilled in him the importance of caring for others and for one's community. Stout carried those lessons with him throughout his professional career and attributes much of the love he has for being a public servant to that upbringing. During his time as County Commissioner, David has continued along that same path. He prioritizes issues such as affordable access to healthcare, serving our veterans, economic development, paying people what they deserve and quality of life. He has proven that he is dedicated to helping as many people as possible within the community he represents and that he sincerely cares about the future of El Paso.

In the area of healthcare he worked tirelessly during his first year in office to find a solution to the problems El Paso Children's Hospital was facing, and helped bring the hospital under the wing of the County and University Medical Center, allowing Children's to continue its mission to serve so many youngsters here in El Paso, instead of having to send them away for treatment. His leadership as the Vice Chair of the Local Mental Health Authority, Emergence Health Network, has brought about positive changes not only in the direction in which the organization is moving and the goals they are setting for themselves, but also the creation of new programs such as Crisis Intervention Training for police officers, which will help them better understand the mentally ill when they come across situations in which they are involved.

His work on quality of life issues has also set Stout apart from the rest. Parks have always been a priority for David, and his leadership has brought about a number of positive changes at Ascarate Park, including a level of investment in the park that has not been seen in recent years. He also has been at the forefront of the battle to create a Community ID that would improve the quality of life for thousands of residents in El Paso County by allowing them access to a number of services they otherwise could not attain, not to mention the improvement in public safety and the economic impact that would be felt if more people had access to an identification.



**Deanna M. Hoelscher, PhD, RDN, LD, CNS, [FISBNPA](#),
Regional Dean, [UTHealth School of Public Health at Austin](#), Director, [Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living](#)**

Dr. Hoelscher's research interests include teaching children and their families to engage in healthier dietary and physical activity behaviors to avoid chronic diseases, with an emphasis on addressing health disparities. Her recent work has focused on implementing interventions and evaluations on policy, systems, and environmental changes. Dr. Hoelscher has received multiple federal and foundation grants, and has over 200 peer-reviewed publications, as well as numerous awards for research, teaching, and mentoring. She is principal investigator of the Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition (Texas SPAN) survey funded by the Texas Department of State Health Services to monitor the prevalence of obesity in school-aged children in the state, and the STREETS project, a NIH-funded natural experiment to determine the effects of Safe Routes to School policies on child physical activity. She is also Director of the Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living, where she oversees the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration project.

In 2018, Dr. Hoelscher became Dean of the UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin, which is the largest of the five regional campuses for the UTHealth School of Public Health. Dr. Hoelscher was President of the International Society of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (ISBNPA) from 2012 to 2013 and elected a Fellow of ISBNPA in 2015. She served as a Member-at-Large for The Obesity Society, and has held leadership positions at the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior.

She has won numerous awards for teaching and research, including the Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award in 2017, and has been designated as a Distinguished Teaching Professor at The University of Texas System.



Sharmily Roy, Director, Center for Social Measurement & Evaluation, [CHILDREN AT RISK](#)

Prior to Children at Risk, Sharmily Roy has work experience in global and domestic public health programs. At the Texas Department of State Health Services, she supported evaluation and technical assistance to improve disease surveillance and reporting. Growing up, Sharmily held a passion for becoming an aid worker to help others, which has inevitably carried into her work today. She is dedicated to improving systems to serve the needs of children so they can live safe, fulfilled, and empowered lives in good health.

Sharmily is originally from Atlanta, GA, where she received her Bachelor's degree in International Relations from Agnes Scott College and Masters in Public Health at Georgia State University. She is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at UTHealth Science Center at Houston.



Dr. Carmen Rocco, [General Practice Physician](#), [Brownsville, TX](#)

After graduation from the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, I have been a general practicing pediatrician along the Texas-Mexico Border in the city of Brownsville for 36 years. During that time, I have participated in multiple binational activities including a joint Rio Grande Valley-Mexico Pediatric Society. We have also led several binational projects including the investigation adverse health conditions such as anencephaly, lack of prenatal care, zinc and its impact on growth and development.

Social determinants of health on both sides of the border have been at the forefront of several organizations that I have led including One Border Foundation and Mano a Mano.



Dr. Ayoub-Rodriguez, Associate Professor, [Texas Tech Health Science Center, El Paso](#)

Lisa Ayoub-Rodriguez MD is an Associate Professor at Texas Tech Health Science Center El Paso and works as a Hospitalist at El Paso Children's Hospital in El Paso, Tx. She also serves as Division Chief of Pediatric Hospital Medicine. She trained at University of Texas Southwestern for medical school and Cincinnati Children's for pediatric residency. Her goal was to strengthen her skill set as much as possible before returning home to El Paso to fulfill her dream of improving healthcare in the border region. She is passionate about the border community given its high rates of un- and underinsured along with high rates of poverty that have colored the region's medical milieu. She has been on the front line of the refugee surges over the last decade and has worked to organize local efforts to provide medical care in this vulnerable population. She has dedicated her career path to developing local experts in the field of Border Health by developing a Border Health Curriculum for the Pediatric Residency Program and working toward expansion to other programs. She is an advocate for underserved and immigrant children. She has spoken nationally as an expert on immigrant child health. She is also married and has two young children, one with Down Syndrome, they have brought tremendous joy and new life adventures.



Ruth Mason, Ruth Mason, MSN, RNC-NIC, Director of [Children's Services, Valley Baptist Medical Center – Brownsville](#)

18 years of practicing as a Registered Nurse. I started my career working at Valley Baptist Medical Center – Harlingen in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, where I grew as a baby nurse and was challenged to improve to obtain better outcomes. I took on the challenge of clinical educator while employed at Rio Grande Regional and Mission Hospital, where I was instrumental in the success of the first neonatal designation survey for the facility. I enjoy teaching others and researching on best outcomes. I love data and numbers and can organize and lead a Quality Assessment Process Improvement program using data collected. Obtained BSN degree in 2007 and Master's Degree in 2020. Started working at VBMC-Brownsville as the Director of Children's Services in June of 2018. I am focused and dedicated to the improvement of human life...particularly that of the neonate. My goal is to give our neonates a fighting chance at a quality life. I am the wife of the late Kyle Rogers Mason and we share two children, Madison, 13, and Kyle, 10.



Denise Vasquez, MPH, Research [Coordinator, UT Health](#)

Denise is a Research Coordinator at the UTHealth- School of Public Health in El Paso, where she obtained her Master's degree in Public Health in 2013. She works in the field of health promotion and has enjoyed working with Community Health Workers on a variety of community health projects for the past 6-7 years. She grew up in El Paso, Texas with family on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border and she continually looks for opportunities to engage in work that helps address health inequalities in the community.



Hansel O. Ibarra, MPA, Program [Director, MHP Salud](#)

Hansel O. Ibarra serves as a Program Director for MHP Salud. This non-profit organization promotes the Community Health Worker (CHW) profession nationally as a culturally appropriate strategy to improve health programs and empower underserved Latino communities. Here Hansel assists on community-based interventions and research that help eradicate barriers to health care and social services for vulnerable populations, specifically the Latino(a) community. Hansel earned a master's degree in Public Affairs (MPA) from The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2019. Hansel is bilingual in English and Spanish, and he is in MHP Salud's Weslaco Office.



Leah D. Whigham, PhD, FTOS, Associate Professor at [UTHealth](#) and Director, [UTHealth Center for Community Health Impact](#)

Leah Whigham, PhD, FTOS, is the founding director of the Center for Community Health Impact (CCHI) and Associate Professor with The University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston (UTHealth) School of Public Health in the Department of Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences in El Paso, Texas. Dr. Whigham has over 20 years of experience in basic, clinical, and community sciences as they relate to obesity. Her research has increased our understanding of metabolism as it relates to obesity, the influence of nutrients and immune function on body composition, and the impact of the environment on nutrition and physical activity. She has received over \$11 million in grant funding, has given numerous invited presentations in national and international conferences, and mentored dozens of students. Driven by the needs of the community and informed by the best science, the CCHI provides a bridge between research and application to effectively mobilize individuals, families, organizations, and communities to build a culture of health. Dr. Whigham serves on the Executive Committee as Secretary/Treasurer of The Obesity Society, the leading professional society dedicated to better understanding, preventing, and treating obesity. Dr. Whigham is Editor-in-Chief of the Springer Nature journal, *Nutrition & Diabetes* (2020 IF 5.097).

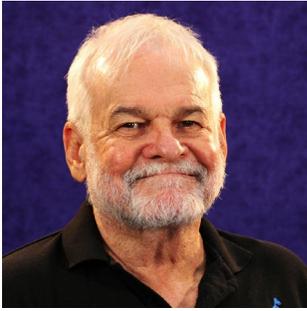


Dalinda Gonzalez-Alcantar, M.Ed. [CEO](#), [Boys & Girls Club of McAllen](#)

Dalinda Gonzalez-Alcantar is a mom, wife, and social entrepreneur currently serving her community as CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of McAllen serving over 8,000 K-12 children and teens through after school programming, summer camp, and athletics. More recently Gonzalez-Alcantar launched Alablanca Apparel, an e-commerce clothing line inspired by humanity on the South Texas border. Her technology startup, eJucomm, was acquired by San Francisco based CampusOrb, a victory for women and Hispanics.

Gonzalez-Alcantar was born and raised in McAllen, TX and has over 10 years of teaching Experience most recently serving at Robert Vela High School. She received her Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Communication Design from Texas State University, San Marcos and her Masters in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas Pan American. Gonzalez-Alcantar began her work in educational policy as an intern with Senator Edddie Lucio in his Austin office. Her innovative approaches to affecting family communication in schools has led Gonzalez-Alcantar to receive numerous awards and recognitions including the McAllen Chamber of Commerce Innovation Grant, The United States Small Business Administration's Innovation Through Technology Business of the Year for the Rio Grande Valley, Parenting Magazine's Mom Congress Texas Delegate, among other honors. On an international stage, Gonzalez-Alcantar spoke at Austin's SXSW conference & festival where she shared her experiences and research on the topic, "Minority Report: Engaging Kids of Color in Tech." In 2019 Gonzalez-Alcantar was appointed to The Boys & Girls Club of America's National Intergovernmental Affairs committee, Texas State University's Development Council, and more recently Gonzalez-Alcantar was appointed to BGCA's President's Advisory Council, a national council aimed at fulfilling BGCA's mission. More recently in 2020, Dalinda was named the National Southwest Executive of the Year representing seven states for her nationwide leadership in the youth development space during the pandemic.

Gonzalez-Alcantar is the proud mother of Elijah and Madalin and wife to fellow educator, Marco Alcantar. Her main focus is on her family and community and attributes her success to her supportive children and husband while giving God the glory in all she does. Together the Alcantar's serve their community through Baptist Temple in McAllen, TX where Gonzalez-Alcantar serves on the finance committee. You can follow her on Twitter and Instagram at [@soy_dalinda](#).



David (Gus) Kennedy, Executive Director, [Communities in Schools of Hidalgo County](#)

Gus has served as the Executive Director for Communities in Schools of Hidalgo County for 32 years and contracts with the Department of Defense. He earned his Bachelor's degree in Philosophy and Old Testament Studies, pursued a Masters in Theology, and graduated with his Doctorate in International Business.

Formerly, he served as an RC Priest with deployments to Santiago, Chile during the Pinochet years and later to the refugee camps in Honduras and Guatemala during the war in El Salvador. He worked as a street priest on the 'West Side' of San Antonio. He is married to Ana with two children, Kathleen-Nasa-'Mission Control' and Joshua Movie director. Gus was born in Boston to a family with twelve siblings.



Jana Renner, Senior Program Officer, [Paso del Norte Health Foundation](#)

Jana Renner is a Senior Program Officer at the Paso del Norte Health Foundation where she manages the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity initiatives. She works with community partners to improve nutrition and expand opportunities for residents to be physically active. In April 2019, Jana was selected as a 2019 Walking Fellow in the American Walks Walking College. Jana completed a Bachelor of Arts in Biology from Trinity University and a Master of Public Administration from The University of Texas at El Paso. She has lived in El Paso for 22 years and calls it home. She and her husband have three children, two in college and one in high school.



Michelle Smith, State Coordinator, [Texas Action for Healthy Kids](#)

Michelle Smith is a marketing and research consultant who became active in school health when she became a parent some 25 years ago. She is currently the State Coordinator for Texas Action for Healthy Kids. Michelle managed a national level community awareness project promoting coordinated school health for the American Cancer Society (ACS) in the late 90s. In 2012 Michelle completed a project for Action for Healthy Kids with a goal of engaging middle school parents in wellness activities in schools. In 2016-17, Michelle worked with National PTA and Action for Healthy Kids on a parent engagement project called Parents for Healthy Kids. Besides her work with SHACs, grants and school health related webinars, she is currently involved in a school district project in El Paso to improve the health of children by focusing on wellness policies, SHACs and community engagement.

Michelle is an active advocate for school health issues on a state as well as a local basis, serving as chair for the Partnership for a Healthy Texas for two legislative sessions. She was parent chair on her local school health advisory council where she served for almost 20 years, as well as serving on the Texas Action for Healthy Kids Steering Committee since 2002. Michelle was named the 2016 Texas Health Champion by the Michael and Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living. She has also been recognized as a CATCH champion, received John P. McGovern Award from the Texas School Health Association and the Distinguished Service Award from the Texas Association of Health, PE, Recreation and Dance. She was named a Healthy School Hero by the Action for Healthy Kids in 2004 and 2006.



Juan Antonio Aguilera Mendoza, MD, PhD, MPH, Staff Research Scientist, [Stanford University](#)

Dr. Aguilera is a research scientist at Stanford University and joined the Sean N. Parker Center for Allergy & Asthma Research in 2020. His research focuses on the impact of air pollution on cardiorespiratory and immune health in children, pregnant women, and firefighter cohorts. Juan obtained his Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences from the University of Texas at El Paso and his MD from the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. He has investigated the negative effects of traffic-related air pollutants on physical activity in children with asthma as well as the associations of traffic and transportation-related variables with cardiorespiratory biomarkers in low-income populations in the border community.



Ersela Kripa, Architect, Founding Partner of [AGENCY](#), Director & Associate Professor [TTU College of Architecture El Paso](#)

Ersela Kripa is an Associate Professor and Director of Texas Tech College of Architecture (CoA) – El Paso, and Director of Projects at POST (Project for Operative Spatial Technologies), a CoA research center. Ersela is a registered architect and founding partner of AGENCY. Her awards include the Rome Prize in Architecture, the Emerging Voices award from The Architectural League of New York, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters award, among others. Ersela holds a Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design from Columbia University GSAPP.



Stephen Mueller, Architect, Founding Partner of [AGENCY](#), Director of Research at [POST](#) & Research Assistant Professor, [TTU College of Architecture El Paso](#)

Stephen Mueller is a Research Assistant Professor at Texas Tech University College of Architecture (CoA) and Director of Research at POST (Project for Operative Spatial Technologies), a CoA research center. Stephen is a registered architect and founding partner of AGENCY. His awards include the Rome Prize in Architecture, the Emerging Voices award from The Architectural League of New York, the American Academy of Arts and Letters award, and the 2019 GSAPP Incubator Prize from Columbia University among others. Stephen holds a Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design from Columbia University GSAPP.

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