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The Buena Vida Barrio: A Brownsville transitional neighborhood

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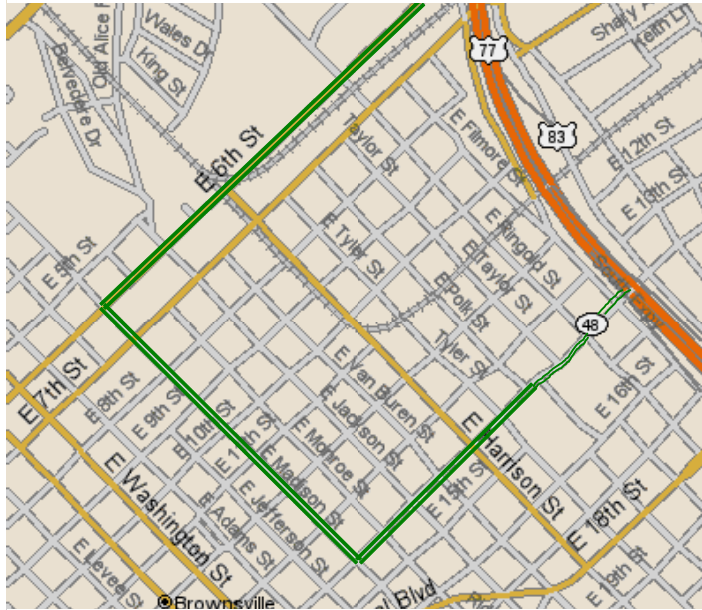
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***THE BUENA VIDA BARRIO:
- A BROWNSVILLE TRANSITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD -***



A CBIRD (Cross Border Institute for Regional Development)
The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College
Report

for
The Center for Civic Engagement
and
The Community Outreach Partnership Centers

by
Baltazar Arispe y Acevedo, Jr., Ph.D.
Ignacio E. Rodríguez, M.A.
Oralia De los Reyes, M.B.A.



Brownsville, Texas
May 15, 2003

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Brownsville, Texas
May 15, 2003

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Michael E. Porter, writing in the Harvard Business Review (1995), makes the following observation, “the economic distress of America’s inner cities may be the most pressing issue facing the nation. The lack of businesses and jobs in disadvantaged urban areas not only fuels a crushing cycle of poverty but also crippling social problems, such as drug abuse and crime. And, as the inner cities continue to deteriorate, the debate on how to aid them grows increasingly divisive.” Porter does go on to address the assets and competitive advantages of the inner cities and these liabilities, merits, challenges and opportunities are evident in the Buena Vida barrio¹, one of the oldest residential neighborhoods of Brownsville, Texas.

The Center for Civic Engagement at the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC) has been established to provide community development and capacity building services to the residents of the Buena Vida and other communities in this region. CBIRD: The Cross Border Institute for Regional Development has been conducting a commissioned assessment of this community to identify its demographic profile as well as those issues of development that need to be addressed by the diverse leadership of Brownsville and UTB/TSC. The report provides select quantitative and qualitative data that show that this inner city barrio is one of the most disadvantaged within a region that is considered one of the most distressed in the nation by the U.S. Census Bureau (2002).

The overriding concern of the Center for Civic Engagement was to determine the status quo of this community and its capacity to become involved in its own development. The data indicates that this barrio lacks the social, economic and educational infrastructure to develop a participatory leadership that can assume advocacy roles on its behalf. An overriding element, that is consistent in the data, is that this barrio is a micro representation of the overall low quality of life that has been identified for both Cameron County and the City of Brownsville by the U.S. Census Bureau. There were several mitigating variables that emerged from the data that will have some impact on this barrio’s ability to become part of the region’s economic and social mainstream. Of these the most challenging were the high percentages of undocumented residents, the inordinate numbers of renters, the low economic capacity of employed residents and the high crime rates that exceed those of the region in general.

“The economic distress of America’s inner cities may be the most pressing issue facing the nation.”

Michael E. Porter

¹ In this report Barrio, Community and Neighborhood are used interchangeably.

There are many evident assets in this community and those are delineated in a section of this report. The most notable of these assets are the two elementary schools that are performing at any outstanding level by all standard measures. An obvious asset is the neighborhood's accessible location next to Brownsville's downtown and to the international bridges to Matamoros. Another asset, for future development consideration, is the community's proximity to a major recreational and business zone, the Linear Park that the city and other vested stakeholders are constructing on the barrio's westernmost boundary. An outstanding asset is the city's investment in this community's infrastructure, which provides a solid base for inner city development such strategic emphasis emerge from the private, public and non-profit leadership.

The challenge to all public and private elements and the diverse leadership cadres of the City of Brownsville is that they must demonstrate that they can respond proactively to the needs of their most disenfranchised community. This report provides seventeen action items for the consideration of policy brokers, elected officials, appointed boards' membership, not-for-profit agencies and the public and post-secondary education institutions. The resulting outcomes that impact the quality of life of the Buena Vida neighborhood may well dictate how the City of Brownsville is perceived by government agencies, the philanthropy community and corporate sponsors.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC) received a \$399,000 grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 2001. This grant was funded by HUD's Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) and UTB/TSC initiated the development of its Center for Civic Engagement Outreach Project later in 2001.

The pilot phase of this project focuses on one of Brownsville's oldest barrios, Buena Vida. This community is located adjacent to the old downtown business district of Brownsville and was designated a Champion Community by HUD in 1997. Essentially this designation means that this community is one which is in need of an infusion of initiatives and resources to ameliorate existing negative social conditions such as high unemployment, high illiteracy, sub-standard housing, high health risks, and a higher than normal poverty rate along with a high crime rate. This report will address these items later within the context of its various data sets and corresponding narrative.

The Center for Civic Engagement Outreach Project consists of three major action items that include the following:

1. The development of a Center for Civic Engagement whose charge is to promote and facilitate community involvement and responsibility within UTB/TSC. The higher education community is to engage itself in effective and sustainable programs of community outreach and function as a resource center for the local community.
2. The development and continuous delivery of community leadership and organizing support services and training to expand the capacity of the Buena Vida community to obtain and use skills to assume proactive roles in advocacy and outreach before policy brokers within the region to affect the quality of life of its citizens.
3. The development and maintenance of neighborhood revitalization activities which focus on urban issues in Buena Vida through public safety awareness, the development of green spaces for recreation and cultural activities and the continuous development of the community's historic heritage.

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College have demonstrated a commitment to this project through the purchase of a historically designated property, the Cueto Building, to house the offices of the staff of the Center for Civic Engagement. This facility is being restored to historic standards and is located at the intersection of Madison and 13th streets which is within the boundaries of the Buena Vida community and within four blocks of the university. This center will be the nexus for the development, implementation and delivery of services to meet the targeted three activities and outcomes which have been previously delineated.

The Cross Border Institute for Regional Development (CBIRD) was commissioned by the Center for Civic Engagement in December of 2002 to conduct an extensive environmental scan of the Buena Vida community. CBIRD is the regional policy research component of the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College. CBIRD is a “think-tank” that has conducted extensive policy studies on issues of economic development, the infrastructure of the Border Region, the future of higher education in South Texas and most recently, a commissioned benchmarking study of both Cameron County and Matamoros, Mexico.

The charge to CBIRD was to:

- Identification of critical issues, challenges and opportunities within the Buena Vida community that impact its quality of life.
- Development of data bases that can be used to reinforce statements of need for the consideration of future projects within the targeted community.
- Development of data sets that can be used to guide strategic visioning and planning for the Buena Vida community.
- Identification of timely and most recent data on the social indicators that impact the targeted community’s continued viability. Among those being: demographics, housing, education, crime, literacy, employment, economic development, community support services and leadership.
- Development of policy perspectives and recommended action items to guide the advocacy agenda for the university community.

STUDY DESIGN

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Harold R. Johnson and John E. Tropman in **The Setting of Community Organization Practice** (1984) have defined community as, “the territorial organization of people, goods, services and commitments. It the community is an important subsystem of the society and one in which many “locality relevant” functions are carried on.” Johnson and Tropman see the “community” as one which is in trouble since the problems of urban areas will not yield quickly to solution. This condition is one which is still present in 2003 in the Buena Vida barrio.

For the purpose of this study, the research team decided to focus on the discovery and assessment of descriptive statistics that would be readily found within existing public data bases and records. The availability of extensive data from the U.S. Census Bureau and from local government agencies gave the researchers access to sources that were not available as recently as 1990. The use of technology, via the internet, provided the research team with the means to both access data bases and communicate with reference experts in a timely manner. Also, it was decided that there would be a focus on key policy brokers, public servants, service providers and opinion brokers whose shared and individual perspectives would provide fertile data for analysis of the Buena Vida barrio. There is much information that reflects feedback from on-site interviews of different individuals in their offices or in sites within Buena Vida.

The focus of such an approach, which is related to the standard needs assessment, is that it is, “possible to make useful estimates of the needs and social well-being of those in a community by analyzing statistics on factors found to be highly correlated with persons in need,” according to Warheit, Bell and Schwab in “Selecting the Needs Assessment Approach” (1984). This study is one which required much interaction with the environment through both walking and driving tours which led to a visual tour of Buena Vida which is presented in key photographs that are related to the data.

The recent and post-**9-11** environment and the war with Iraq created conditions that made it necessary to refrain from direct interactions with the citizen on the street. This course of action was necessary due to the heightened security alerts on the United States/Mexico Border and also the overwhelming presence of the Border Patrol in Brownsville’s inner city. There were instances when the researchers were treated with suspicion and it was believed that there was nothing to be gained by the creation of

social interactions that would be uncomfortable to both the subjects and the research team. Under “normal conditions” the researchers would have conducted on the street interviews and informal dialogues with members of the target community. The demographic data which is presented in section III of this report will provide more background on the population’s characteristics that influenced the data gathering processes.

In planning the data collection design the research team relied on recommended procedures and processes that were designed by HUD in 1996 in its publication, **Mapping Your Community: Using Geographic Information to Strengthen Community Initiatives**. HUD presented a data collection guide for identifying census data commonly used in neighborhood analysis. This guide was used to develop both a model [Figure A] and a data matrix to guide the environmental scan. The Buena Vida community was also mapped out [Figure A] and several walking and driving tours were made in the community to obtain first person impressions of the environment which are correlated to the statistical data in this report.

Figure A

Environmental Scan Applications Model



Source: CBIRD UTB/TSC, 2003.

Figure A is a collation of several elements that the researchers contend are necessary to describe factors that are evident in a community’s environment as one goes about matching data to ethnographic impressions and observations. The key element to be considered here is whether there is the presence of the essential elements necessary for the continued

sustainability of the Buena Vida community. The essential elements that were the focus of this study are:

- Collaborations
- Advocacy
- Resource Development
- Community Health
- Strategic Vision
- Strategic Planning
- Leadership Development
- Educational Development
- Infrastructure Development
- Residential Development
- Economic Development
- Networks

The search was guided by the evidence [data] that would substantiate the presence or absence of these core elements which CBIRD believes ground a community's continuous sustainability.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The search for data was anchored in both the environmental scan model [Figure A] and by variables that were segmented into major categories and subsets of information that needed to be collected and analyzed. The Buena Vida Project Schedule [Table 1] was normed and developed to meet the guidelines that HUD has recommended in its **Mapping Your Community Guide in 1996**. This schedule was followed and reviewed continuously by the research team to ensure adherence to the schedule and to review gaps in the data collection process or impediments to access to data resources. In several instances the researchers found that there was no data being stored in a depository, such as the City of Brownsville’s health data, and in another instance the researchers had to work with the Brownsville Police Department to collate and organize existing crime data into a presentable format. Another major impediment was also the scarcity or absence of business data from either the City’s Tax Assessor or the Office of the State Comptroller. The researchers had to conduct a block by block inventory of all businesses in the Buena Vida neighborhood and then develop a format to represent these businesses by categories. No data was found or accessed to provide an overview of net or gross economic impact or the number of employees for each business in the targeted community.

Table 1 - Buena Vida Project Schedule

Demographic Data Assessment:	Safety and Security:
Population data from Census 2000	Crime rates by types
Population age pyramids	Records of crime reports
Population by age and gender cohorts	Number of victims of crime by type of crime
Number of households	Juvenile court filings
Household income	9-1-1 Calls
Social and Health Characteristics:	Community Resources and Participation:
Birth rates by type (live births and infant mortality rates)	Type of public assistance services accessed by residents
Teen birth rates	Number and types of religious organizations
Pre-natal care participation	Public govtm. investment in the community
Immunization rates for children by age and gender	Infrastructure
Insurance coverage by family and household type	Community Development Block Grants
Dental health accessibility	Environmental Development Grants
Major evident illnesses	Parks and recreation
Communicable diseases (those reported and recorded)	Health services
Medicaid participation	Green space and vacant land within target area
Accessibility rates for health/medical services	Libraries by location and participation rates
Menal Health, alcohol & other drug treatments Records	Community centers by type, location and participation rates
Community mortality (coroner’s report of deaths)	Leadership activities by types and focus
Households receiving public assistance	Number of parks and location with usage overview
Availability and location of license day care services	Local service and civic organizations and participation rates
Availability & location of non-licensed day care services	Public transit routes, schedules and ridership rates
Subsidized day care rates	Automobile registrations and licenses

Housing:	Community Economic Characteristics
Number of housing units	Labor force participation
Type of structure	Population Employment by occupations & industries
Size of units	Self-employment rate
Local tax value and tax rates for real estate	Unemployment rate
Building and demolition permits records	Tenure of businesses
Housing code enforcement (Housing quality measures)	Business investments by type
Public subsidized housing by number, type and location	Types of businesses and site location
Tenure of renters or owners (at the present site)	Average earning of labor force participants
Rate of overcrowding	Unemployment benefits
Housing affordability (ratio housing expense to income)	Public training participation rates
Value and rent levels	Investment in economic development by public government
Vacancy rate	Investment in community dev. by private entities
Landowner types	Available information technology within the community
Mobility (within the neighborhood)	Work sites of labor force participants
Inward-Outward migration patterns	Neighborhood generated employment
Education:	Report writing and editing
Educational rates by age and gender cohorts	Narrative
Head Start Participation	Format
Enrollment data from assigned attendance zones	Bibliography
Education achievement of children by assessment test	Charts & Tables
Educational levels of adults by age and gender	Cover Design
Educational participation rates in extra-curricular activities	Pictures
Participation rates in ABE/ESL/GED	Webpage
Post-secondary education participation rates	Maps
Avg cost/student investment ratios from school district	Printing

Source: CBIRD-UTB/TSC

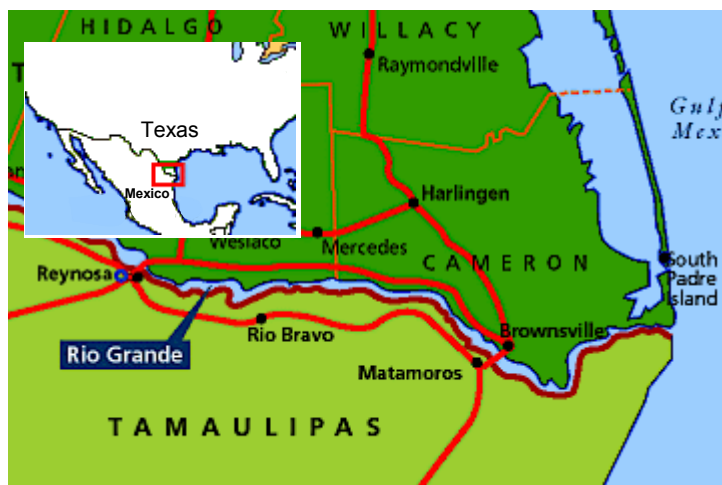
The collected data was analyzed by reviewing and applying standard practices and guides as described by Cox, Erlich, Rothman and Tropman (1984). Another source for data analysis was Miles and Huberman's **Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods** (1984). The most reliable source for the continuous analysis of the data was HUD's **Mapping Your Community** (1996) which served as an excellent guide for the development of maps and the aggregation of data into tables, charts and graphs to represent information in a more succinct and focused manner for the diverse audiences that will review the report.

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

GEOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The Buena Vida community is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Brownsville and in South Texas. It is also one that lacks a historical reference as to its origins. A search of the archives of the Stillman Historic Museum in Brownsville found no references about Buena Vida in the many newspapers, newsletters and other written materials that have been collected about Brownsville since the Post-Civil War period. What is known is that this community is located within one of the fast growing areas in the United States and at the southernmost tip of Texas within one mile of the Mexican border. The Buena Vida neighborhood is located within six blocks of the old downtown business district of Brownsville, the county seat of Cameron County.

Figure B – South Texas Border



Source: Adapted by CBIRD UTB/TSC, 2003.

In order to understand the Buena Vida community it is, we believe, necessary to understand the surrounding environments that impact the daily lives of its residents. Buena Vida is, in many ways, a microcosm of the macrocosm which is South Texas, Brownsville and its Mexican Border twin city, Matamoros. The map [Figure B] of South Texas shows an area that is at the tip of the United States and the eastern most starting point of the border with Mexico which ends in the Tijuana/San Diego region. This region is, according to the United States Census Bureau, one of the most impoverished in the country. In November of 2002, the Census Bureau ranked the top 220 counties nationwide with a minimum population of

The Buena Vida community is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Brownsville and in South Texas. It is also one that lacks a historical reference as to its origins.

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250,000 in terms of ten poverty-related issues indicated in blue in Table 2. These data was collated and analyzed by CBIRD and the University of Texas at Austin’s IC-2 Institute in a recent benchmarking report, **Cameron County/Matamoros at the Crossroads: Assets and Challenges for Accelerated Regional and Binational Development (2003)**.

Table 2 - National Rankings: U.S. Counties (Population 250,000 or more – 220 Total)

Poverty Rankings	Cameron	Hidalgo
Percent of People Below Poverty Level	1	2
Percent under 18 below Poverty Level	1	3
Percent 65+ Below Poverty Level	2	1
Education Rankings		
Less Than a High School Diploma	2	1
Percent of High School Graduate or Higher	219	220
Percent of People with a Bachelor's Degree or More	212	217
Economy Rankings		
Percent in Labor Force	219	220
Median Household Income	220	218
Median Family Income	220	219
Median Value	218	219
Other Related Issues		
Fertility of Unmarried Women: All women with Birth	134	182
Fertility: Rate per 1,000 Women 15 to 19 Years Old	44	1
Percent of Children Under 6 with All Parents in Work Force	220	219
Speaking a Language Other than English	2	1
Speaking Spanish at Home	2	1
Percent Owner-Occupied Housing Units	114	179
Median Monthly Housing Cost for Renters	219	220
Median Monthly Housing Cost for Mortgaged Owners	219	217

Source: *Cameron County/Matamoros At the Crossroads, 2003*

The data shows that Brownsville and its parent county, Cameron, along with its sister border city of Matamoros, Mexico are in severe distress as it relates to those social indicators that demonstrate a capacity to respond to the challenges and opportunities to improve a region’s quality of life.

The data shows that Brownsville and its parent county, Cameron, along with its sister border city of Matamoros, Mexico are in severe distress as it relates to those social indicators that demonstrate a capacity to respond to the challenges and opportunities to improve a region’s quality of life. Cameron County and its neighbor Hidalgo County are ranked repeatedly at the low or lowest end of the rankings as the worst locations in the country in terms of population in poverty, literacy, overall education, labor force participation, median family income, availability of housing and the inordinate costs associated with rental property. The data about Buena Vida, which will be further detailed in this report, reiterates and mirrors to a more negative extreme the county’s indicators of progress that are

The City of Brownsville, in its 1994 HUD Enterprise Community Strategic Plan, designated the Buena Vida community as one “in distress.”

presented by the U.S. Census Bureau. The City of Brownsville, in its 1994 HUD Enterprise Community Strategic Plan, designated the Buena Vida community as one “in distress.” The data show that the “distress conditions” that were evident in 1994 have not been ameliorated to a significant degree nine years later.

The major challenges in addressing the needs of communities in distress are linked to the economic wherewithal of the City of Brownsville. Brownsville is not a wealthy community and its local resources are insufficient to meet the goals that it set forth in its Enterprise Community application. The City of Brownsville, in its 2000-2003 Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development, refers to the Texas Employment Commission’s evaluation that “ranks Brownsville as the most economically disadvantaged city in the state.”

One of the most pronounced negative conditions is the quality and availability of housing stock that is on either the sales or rental markets. In 1996, the Texas State Comptroller conducted an extensive review of the South Texas border from Brownsville to El Paso and the findings were published in the report, **Bordering the Future**. The South Texas region’s housing crisis is one of the major challenges facing all governmental agencies in both small and large communities. According the Comptroller’s report, “only one house is built for every two that are needed. Some 400,000 residents-nearly one in three Border workers-earn less than what it takes to afford a house or apartment, compared to one in seven non-Border workers.”

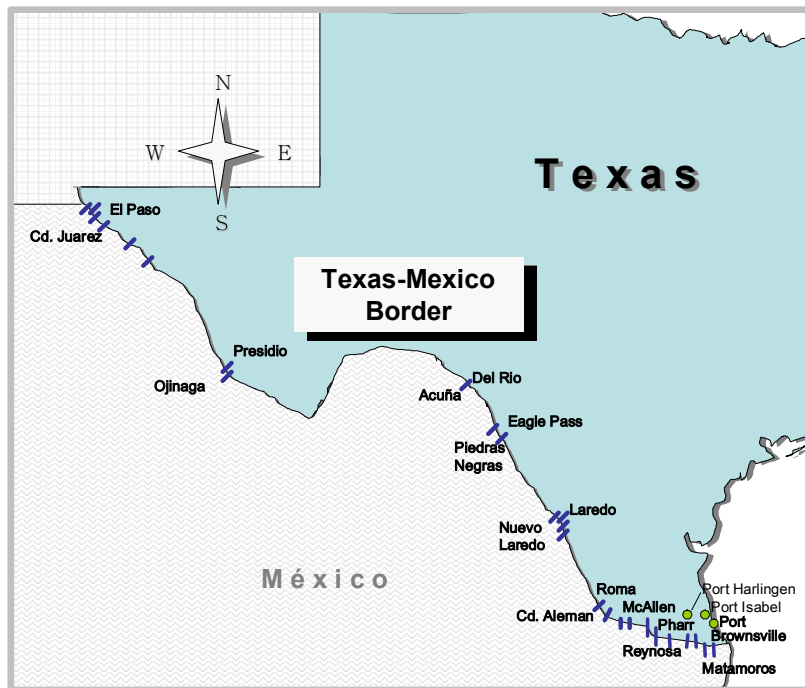
The data shows that the “distress conditions” that were evident in 1994 have not been ameliorated to a significant degree nine years later.

The correlation between an expanding population which remains poor is one which is reiterated in other reports that attend to the region’s broad economic and social conditions. The first one is the previously referenced CBIRD’s benchmarking study of Cameron County and Matamoros. The second one was conducted by the office of Texas State Senator Eliot Shapleigh from El Paso. Senator Shapleigh’s report, **Texas Borderland: Frontiers of the Americas** (2003) confirms, affirms and reiterates the chronic economic, housing, education, health and related conditions that are impairing this region’s capacity to fully participate in a world economy that is becoming technologically challenging and which requires a stable and capable population to participate in all facets of society. CBIRD also addressed these conditions, as they relate to the Border’s NAFTA based economy, in its 2002 report, **An Updated Overview of the Texas Border**, which it conducted on commission from the Texas Border Infrastructure Coalition.

Another consideration here is the integrated and connected thread [micro] that is represented in the daily economic, linguistic, cultural, demographic

and social exchange that is part and parcel of the lifeline between Brownsville and Matamoros. The City of Brownsville Planning Department makes a very telling observation about how it views this situation when it states that, “the close relationship between Brownsville and Matamoros creates a constant multi-directional flow of migration between the U.S.-Mexico Border. [Figure C] This close relationship also means that the two cities share many of the same economic, environmental, and social assets and problems. Among the shared characteristics are: similar economic bases (agricultural, manufacturing); bilingual communications; a majority population of Mexican descent; large numbers of immigrant farm workers; and extreme poverty.” (2000-2003 Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development)

Figure C: Texas-Mexico Border



Source: CBIRD UTB/TSC. August, 2002

The Buena Vida community is an inner city barrio [Figure D] surrounded by the hustle and bustle of enterprises at its fringes, along its boundaries and in small pockets within its boundaries. It is bounded on its northeast side by the major highway coming into Brownsville, US Highway 77, on its South side it is less than a half-mile from the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College campus, on its southwest boundary by East Madison which parallels the main downtown arteries of Jefferson, Adams, Washington, Levee and Elizabeth Streets. On its western boundary are the Historical Museum of Brownsville and the

Federal Courthouse for the Southern Judicial District. It is located within one-half mile of the largest zoo in South Texas, Gladys Porter Zoo which is adjacent to a newly rehabilitated park, Dean Porter City Park. There are many amenities adjacent to this neighborhood but not many within the actual community. The one park within the community, Edelstein Park, is in need of rehabilitation and the city recently committed over \$ 250,000 dollars for its reconstruction. Another park, Washington Park, is on Madison and it also needs much rehabilitation to accommodate the needs of Buena Vida residents. The community will be profiled in greater detail with data in Section III which follows.

Figure D – Buena Vida Neighborhood



Source: CBIRD UTB/TSC, 2003.

PHYSICAL & SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROFILE

There is an evident commitment to both community development and the upgrading of Brownsville's infrastructure by the municipal administration as expressed in both its 2000-2003 Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development and 2003 Congressional Briefing Packet for Community Development. The proposed action items that have impacted the physical and social quality of life of Buena Vida residents include the following:

- The allocation of \$27,440 of CDBG funds to the Good Neighbor Settlement House to support its programs and support services to homeless and those in need of food.
- The allocation of \$25,000 of CDBG funds to support the services and programs of the Boys and Girls Club.
- The allocation of \$200,000 to the Good Neighbor Settlement House to rehabilitate 20 residences and the construction of 5 handicap ramps to its facilities to accommodate mobility impaired clients
- The allocation of \$3,330,036, in 2001, to support the construction and development of the Southern Pacific Linear Park which is to make use of property located between 6th and 7th streets and Harrison St. and U.S. 77/83 Expressway [**Map 1**]. This area will serve as the "Gateway to Downtown Brownsville" and all of this development borders the western boundaries of the Buena Vida community. This development will also create the Mitte Cultural District along the Linear Park corridor. Among the cultural and civic institutions that are located in this corridor and within a one-mile radius of Buena Vida are:
 - The Federal Courthouse
 - The Gladys Porter Zoo
 - The Dean Porter Park
 - The Historic Brownsville Museum
 - The Brownsville Police Department and Municipal Court
 - The Cameron County Courthouse
 - The Boys and Girls Club
 - Cummings Middle School
 - Putegnat Elementary School
 - Resaca Elementary School

- The investment of \$250,000 by the City’s Park Department to renovate Edelstein Park which is in the middle of the Buena Vida community.
- The investment of \$2,121,425 [Table 3] from 1983 to 2003 to upgrade the pavement and storm drainage of 31,751 linear feet of streets in Buena Vida. The need to upgrade the Brownsville’s outdated infrastructure will continue to be a challenge according to the city’s director of engineering. This perspective was also shared by the City’s director of public works who reiterated the city’s investment in Buena Vida.

Table 3- 1986-2003 Buena Vida Street’s Investment

YEAR	COST	LINEAR FT.	INVESTMENT %
1986	\$ 985,976.69	21,561.00	46.5%
1991	\$ 211,343.25	1,600.00	10.0%
2002	\$ 122,944.00	960.00	5.8%
2003	\$ 801,161.45	7,630.00	37.8%
TOTAL	\$2,121,425.39	31,751.00	100.0%

Note: Investment on Paving and Storm drainage work
 Source: *Brownsville Traffic and Engineering Dept., 2003*

- The widening and upgrading of U.S. 77/83 between Highway 2348 and 14th street on the Southeast border of Buena Vida represents a \$70 million collaborative between the U.S. and Texas Departments of Transportation and the City of Brownsville. This roadway construction will expand direct access to Brownsville’s downtown, the campus of the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College and to the Buena Vida neighborhood.

The construction of the Linear Park and the widening of U.S. 77/83 may have a major impact on Buena Vida’s quality of life for several reasons, among those being:

- An expanded economic base due to the business and social/cultural activities that will be located and maintained in the Linear Park Complex.
- An opportunity for Buena Vida businesses, that are located adjacent or in close proximity to the Mitte Cultural District, to become involved in social and cultural life of the community.

- The location of an expanded recreational and cultural areas for Buena Vida residents that will also encourage more use of both the Gladys Porter Zoo, the newly renovated Dean Porter Park on Ringgold and 6th street and the museums.
- The emphasis on Buena Vida's development and continued vitality will be intensified as more citizens become aware of its close proximity to downtown, Mexico and the Mitte Cultural District.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS:

There is much development around the Buena Vida neighborhood and it may have a positive impact on the quality of life of this community. Of concern here are the following items as they relate to this barrio's continued transformation:

- The absence of an integrated social support services network to provide ongoing and necessary health, nutrition, counseling, familial development and other at risk intervention programs and services. The principal of Resaca Elementary shared his concern about the lack of a safety net for children and families, in particular female heads of household or females in abusive relationships. The school's home visitation staff had expressed an ongoing concern with the need for after-school programs and daycare services for the school's students. Another concern was the lack of support services for abused women who sometime rush to the school in hope of getting services to prevent or impede ongoing physical abuse from their husbands.
- There are insufficient publicly supported day-care centers in Buena Vida and an absence of any after-school programs for students of either Resaca or Putegnat Elementary Schools. During a site visit to Resaca Elementary there were children still at the school after 4:30 P.M. in violation of school district policies. The staff of the school was doing all it could to get these children safely home where they might spend the rest of the day in a "latch key" situation.
- The Boys and Girls Club, which is located on the western edge of Buena Vida does provide some after school programs such as tutoring, computer literacy, social skills development and recreation in a gym and swimming pool. Unfortunately, there is only an average of 45 daily children participants per day during the school year and this may be due to the \$15 annual membership fee.

During the summer this club has an average daily participation of 300 children per day and the summer fee is \$80. The club has received \$25,000 in CDBG funds from the city but this is apparently insufficient to respond to increasing demands for expanded services from children in distress conditions.

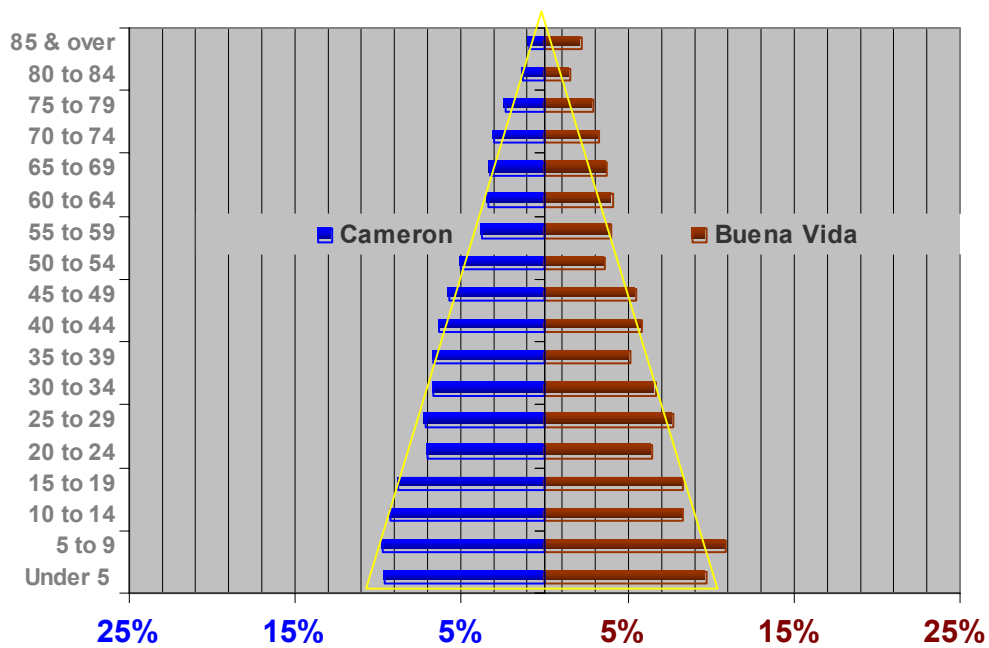
- According to the director of the Boys and Girls Club, the higher renter ratios and turnover in the community creates an unstable membership base. The director shared a concern that children in this community were not receiving social skill development, not being made stakeholders of the community and receiving insufficient extra-curricular academic support to augment the daily work at their schools.
- The absence of an integrated social support services network becomes more pronounced when one considers that the Good Neighbor Settlement House [GNSH] is the primary social services provider in the community. This agency provides services for impoverished individuals that are homeless, in need of clothing and food as well as those needing repairs to their residences. There is a wide gap between what this agency does in Buena Vida and what is available elsewhere in Cameron County. The director shared some 2002 data that shows that GNSH served over 50,000 meals, repaired 24 residences, assisted elderly citizens, and provided clothing, showers, walk-in counseling for children, single men and women. In many instances residents from Matamoros and from cities as far as McAllen and points in-between come to this agency seeking and receiving some sort of assistance. This organization does an outstanding job, with limited resources, in responding to the needs of the most impoverished and distressed of the Buena Vida neighborhood and anyone from anywhere seeking assistance due to its open door policy.
- A continuing challenge to the city's administration will be to obtain more Community Development Block Grant funding which has decreased by \$329,000 in the last fiscal year. Also, there is an apparent need for Brownsville to increase its tax base but that situation will continue to be a challenge in a slow economy that offers little opportunity for the development of diverse revenue streams.
- The City of Brownsville's **2000-2003 Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development** presents an excellent overview of the main issues, challenges and opportunities facing this community.

...children in this community are not receiving social skill development, are not being made stakeholders of the community and are not receiving sufficient extra-curricular academic support to augment the daily work at their schools.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The Buena Vida barrio went through some significant and noticeable changes in its demographic profile from 1990 to 2000. The 1990 population was 3,355 and the census 2000 data show that it now has 2,954 residents. This change reflects a net loss of 401 residents or <12%. The age composition pyramid [Figure E] demonstrates a population trend that is in sync with the balance of Cameron County. This community has about the same number of elderly citizens, slightly more children and less of a middle class than Cameron County.

Figure E - Cameron and Buena Vida Age Pyramid



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Of concern here is the disproportionate number of elderly citizens, ages 60 and above that reside in this community. The age 35 to 60 cohort is less than the balance of Cameron County and this demonstrates a strata of population that typically represents the most educated and most economically viable in a community. The age cohorts between 10 to 30 years of age are in balance with that of the county and the 20-24 years cohort is identical. There are slightly more Buena Vida residents between ages 25-29 than in the balance of the county. It is in the under 10 years of age cohorts that an imbalance is evident. The Buena Vida community is

one with a larger children base than the rest of the county, especially in the age 5-9 group.

The net loss of population in Buena Vida during the 1990's may be the result of several factors, among those being:

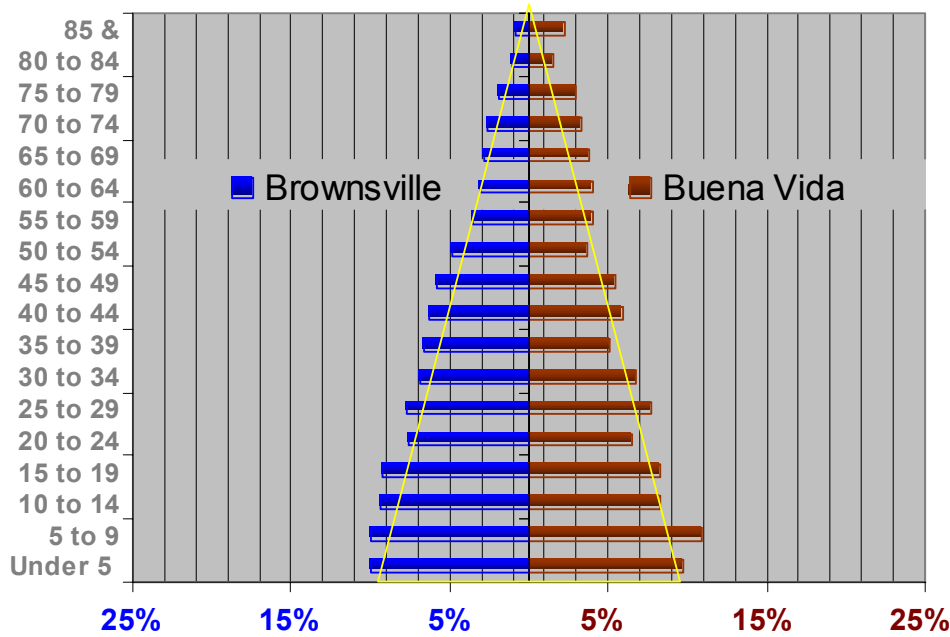
- Outward migration to other South Texas cities, to regional colonias or to other regions of the state or nation by the most mobile residents
- Inward migration of couples with young school age children
- A residual elderly population that is unable to relocate or has limited options

What is present is the increasing number of elderly residents over age 64 and a large base of very young children under age 10. These two cohorts, representing the top and bottom tiers of the population pyramid, [**Figure D**] will place pressure on local government and social services agencies to provide and expand support services in this community. The need for health, parenting training, counseling, daycare and after-school care will not diminish as these populations continue to expand at a time when governmental resources for such programs are limited from all levels of government and from the philanthropic community.

When one compares Buena Vida to the City of Brownsville the imbalance between the ages 60 to 85+ years is even more pronounced [**Figure F**]. The data also show that Buena Vida has a similar number of children ages 5 to 9 years as the balance of Brownsville. The needs of children for support services will be the same for them regardless of where they reside in Brownsville. Buena Vida has a slightly smaller “baby boom” cohort. In contrast Texas has a 29% “baby boom” population, Cameron County’s is 24% and Brownsville’s is 24% while Buena Vida’s baby boom population² is 20%.

² The U.S. Census defines Baby Boomers as individuals born between 1945 and 1964.

Figure F - Brownsville and Buena Vida Age Pyramid



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Missing in Buena Vida is a concentration of the population that was the most active in setting the economic and social trends in the United States during the 1970's, 1980's and to 1990's

Missing in Buena Vida is a concentration of the population that was the most active in setting the economic and social trends in the United States during the 1970's, 1980's and to 1990's [Table 4].

Table 4 – Baby Boomers Population

Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
29%	24%	20%	24%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

This “baby boom” population will be entering its retirement phase within the next decade and its numbers are insufficient in the daily social life of Buena Vida to have made or to make an imprint. It is this population that is residing in the balance of Brownsville, especially in the neighborhoods off Paredes Line Road, Central Boulevard, Price Road, Old Alice Road, Boca Chica and adjacent to Sunrise Mall. The age 34 + population is now moving to the new developments such Paseo de la Resaca, those off East 802 and the new communities off Alton Gloor.

The population of Buena Vida is 56% female and 44% male [Table 5]. Of concern is that there is an imbalance that begins after age 20 and continues a negative decline [males] and a positive increase [female] until age 85.

Table 5 – Buena Vida Population in Household by Gender

Total:	2,954	100%
Males	1,314	44%
Females	1,640	56%

Source: U.S. Census 2000

There is a net difference of 12% in the number of females over males in Buena Vida. When the gender referenced data [Table 6] is compared to the same cohorts in Texas, Cameron County and Brownsville, Buena Vida has a greater percentage of females than males over age 35 years.

Table 6 – Women over men age 35 and more

Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
3.1%	3.7%	6.3%	4.7%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

These data [Table 7] leads the researchers to pose several questions and make several observations that can not be addressed with the available data and would require a more ethnographic approach for a future study. Among those questions and observations are:

- Are there more single unmarried females?
- Are there more female led single family households?
- Are there more married females from immigrant families whose spouses may be working in Mexico?
- Are there more divorced or abandoned females, both legal and undocumented resident in the neighborhood?
- Are there legal or illegal reasons why certain families are not declaring the presence of a male head of household?

Table 7 - Marital Status

	Brownsville		Buena Vida	
	Number	%	Number	%
Total	99,256		2,875	
Male	44,848	45%	1,577	55%
Never married	13,057	29%	530	34%
Now married	28,392	63%	901	57%
Spouse Present	25,123	88%	398	44%
Spouse Absent	3,269	12%	503	56%
Separated	907	3%	54	6%
Widowed	1,011	2%	34	2%
Divorced	2,388	5%	112	7%
Female	54,408	55%	1,298	45%
Never married	14,027	26%	372	29%
Now married	30,741	57%	658	51%
Spouse Present	25,164	82%	421	64%
Spouse Absent	5,577	18%	237	36%
Separated	2,920	9%	120	18%
Widowed	5,452	10%	171	13%
Divorced	4,188	8%	97	7%
Population 15 years and over.				

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

The nativity and place of birth of Buena Vida residents also presents data that may provide insights of the relationship between this community and Matamoros or other parts of Mexico. **Table 8** shows a community profile that is 37% foreign born which is 23.1 points greater than the state average, 11.4 points higher than Cameron County and 5.5 points greater than Brownsville’s 31.5%. One can surmise that both Cameron County and Brownsville have a significant foreign born population but that Buena Vida’s non-native population is concentrated in a more compact geographic area.

Table 8 – Nativity and Place of Birth

Total population	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Native	86.1	74.4	63.0	68.5
Born in United States	85	73.2	60.5	67.0
State of residence	62.2	61.3	57.6	60.2
Different state	22.8	11.9	2.9	6.8
Born outside U.S.	1.1	1.3	2.5	1.5
Foreign born	13.9	25.6	37.0	31.5
Entered to U.S. 1990-2000	6.4	8.6	* 20.3	10.7
Naturalized citizen	4.4	8.8	7.4	11.1
Not a citizen	9.5	16.8	29.6	20.4
* 20.3 % out of the 37.0%				

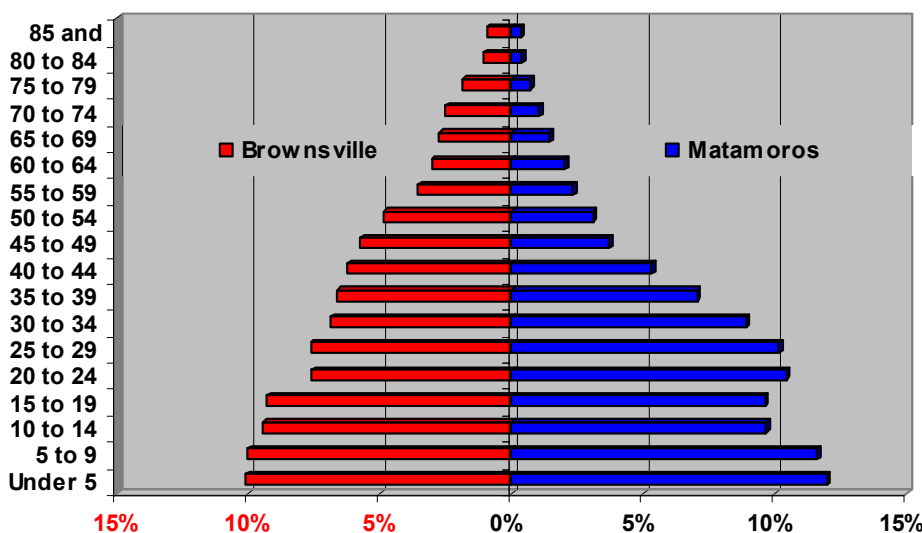
Source: U. S. Census 2000

The proximity to Matamoros and Mexico, in general, has always made Texas an attractive and often used point of entry. The relationship between Brownsville and Matamoros was previously observed by the City of Brownsville’s Planning Department. Demographically the Matamoros population presents a potential spring board for a continuing immigration flow, both legal and illegal, to Brownsville.

The foreign born data [Table 8] is even more significant when 20.3% of it represents growth during the 1990-2000 decade during which only 7.4% became naturalized citizens. 29.6% of this barrio’s residents are non-citizens. The data leads us to state that the Buena Vida neighborhood is “a social incubator” in that its heavily foreign born population uses this community as a locale to acclimate itself, get situated in the United States, work on its citizenship or immigrant status, begin the education of its children, begin an economic base, albeit rather transitional, and then move outward to other areas of the region, state or nation.

Figure G demonstrates a Matamoros demography that is younger and in dire need of external options for economic development. CBIRD’s Cameron County and Matamoros Benchmarking Study found that there are more children under age 14 in Matamoros than there are residents in Brownsville [Figure G]. This data leads the researchers to claim that, Brownsville, and in this particular case, the Buena Vida barrio, will continue to be a safety valve to the economic shortcomings along the Northern Mexico border and especially in Matamoros.

Figure G–2000 Brownsville and Matamoros Age Pyramid



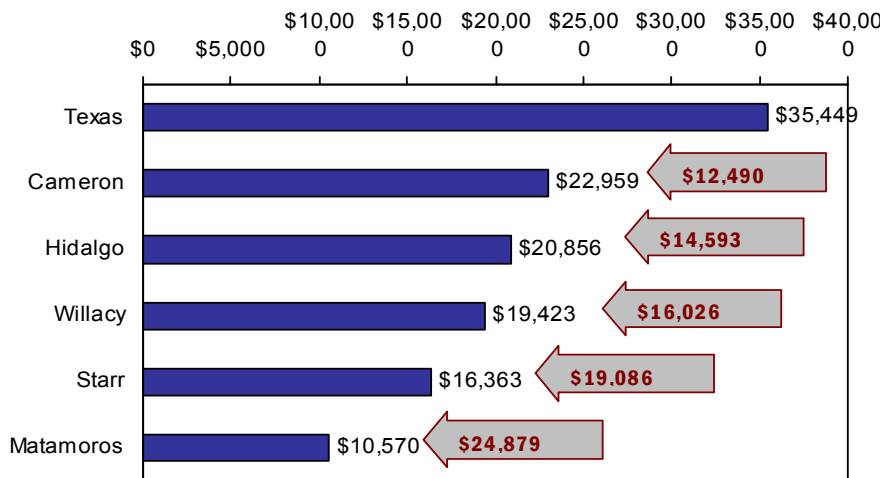
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 & Mexico INEGI 2000

The Buena Vida neighborhood is “a social incubator” in that its heavily foreign born population uses this community as a locale to acclimate itself, get situated in the U.S., work on its citizenship or immigrant status, begin the education of its children, begin an economic base, albeit rather transitional, and then move outward to other areas of the region, state or nation.

“There are more children under age 14 in Matamoros than there are residents in Brownsville.”

Another consideration is the disparity between the income of this region when compared to the balance of the state and the more extreme disparity which exist between Matamoros, Mexico and all Rio Grande Valley counties and especially the city of Brownsville. The data [Table 2] has already demonstrated that Hidalgo and Cameron counties are the poorest among the 220 United States counties with a minimum population of 250,000. The median income for a household in the city of Matamoros, [Figure H] which has an estimated population of nearly 500,000, is \$10,570 [American dollars] which is 54% less than that of Cameron County.

Figure H - Median Household Income: Regional Comparisons



Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Matamoros-IMPLAN

Brownsville, and in this particular case, the Buena Vida barrio, will continue to be a safety valve to the economic shortcomings along the Northern Mexico border and especially in Matamoros.

It should be noted that the US Census Bureau estimated the median household income in Buena Vida in 1999 at \$9,793 which is even less than the estimate for Matamoros. Of course one could argue that there are still more options in terms of employment, wages, benefits, social services and other amenities that will still attract immigrants to the United States.

The language of the economy and for upward mobility in the United States is English even though there is no official national language. The Border region along the United States and Mexico is an area where an individual can function in the society being monolingual in Spanish. This situation may be changing as the infusion of English to all segments of social interactions expands. This is also a condition that will change very slowly and whose impact may be several generations away. Table 9, provides data that show that English, as a primary language of social communications, is used to a lesser degree in Buena Vida [10.1%] than the average in Texas [68.8%], Cameron County [21%] and in the balance of Brownsville [12.8%].

Spanish is the dominant language in the social life of Buena Vida (89.9%) and its use is not significantly different than the use in the balance of the city of Brownsville (86.6%). What is interesting is the over 10% discrepancy between Cameron County and Brownsville. This data may indicate the in-migration of dominant English speakers, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic to suburban communities such as Port Isabel, San Benito, Harlingen, Rancho Viejo and some retirement communities in Cameron County.

Table 9 – Language Spoken at Home

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
English only	68.8	21	10.1	12.8
Spanish	27	78.3	89.9	86.6
Speak English less than "very well"	12.3	35.3	62.2	41.8
Population 5 years and over				

Source: U.S. Census, 2000.

Of concern here is the scarcity of English speakers in Buena Vida that can be trained to assume leadership roles in this community. The business of economics, government, social advocacy and public policy is still carried out in a dominant English environment. This situation may not bode well for the development of a leadership infrastructure that can develop social agendas that attend to the quality of life issues that are present in this community. Also, the demand in the economy is for an expanded bilingual capacity and its obvious absence in Buena Vida may impair the overall economic capacity of its workforce to participate in training programs or to be placed in long-term employment.

Of concern here is the scarcity of English speakers in Buena Vida that can be trained to assume leadership roles in this community.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS:

The demographics of the Buena Vida neighborhood will be delineated further within the context of the education, housing and economic components of this report. There are, however, several observations that can be made about the population characteristics of this neighborhood and their emerging and future impact on this region. Among those are:

- This neighborhood will continue to be a site for inward and outward migration of Mexican and Mexican-American dominant populations due to its proximity to Mexico, especially Matamoros.
- The presence of an above average foreign born and non-citizen population may result in a community which does not demonstrate

a long-term commitment to the quality of life of the neighborhood. They are not here for the “long haul.”

- The social indicators of severe distress are replete in this community and replicate those of its surroundings. A case can be made that this “inner city community” is surrounded by a region that is statistically not much better off in terms of access, upward mobility or development of a better quality of life. Both Cameron County and the City of Brownsville lack the social services infrastructure and public service network to nurture their shared populations.
- The relationship with the cross border city of Matamoros is evident and will be a continuous reinforcing factor to this community’s social, economic, cultural and linguistic development for the long-term.
- The immigrants that gain access to Buena Vida from Mexico do not come in with assets to upgrade the economic or social inventory of the community since they are also in a stage of severe social distress.
- This community is losing population and this factor will mitigate against the development of a stable base for a core of leaders and advocates that will both develop and present a futures oriented agenda to external policy brokers.
- There is a presence of large age cohorts that represent both the very young and elderly populations which are the most in need of social support services.
- The inward migration represents families with young children that will bring a continuing challenge to the two neighborhood elementary schools’ capacities to provide the excellent education that appears to already be the standard at Resaca and Putegnat.
- The absence of a significant “baby boom” population indicates the scarcity of a group of individuals that have been the leaders in setting the economic and social tone of a community. This is the cadre from which leaders emerge and none is present in a significant number to be trained or to assume leadership roles.
- The presence of a more females than males in this community is a cause for concern since one could surmise that heads of households are not male or that the male spouse may be working or residing elsewhere. This situation leads to the development of an “at-risk”

Both Cameron County and the City of Brownsville lack the social services infrastructure and public service network to nurture their shared populations.

population of females that is both vulnerable and which does not have access to a corresponding safety network of services to assist their families.

- The reliance of the majority of this neighborhood's residents on Spanish for their social, political, cultural, familial and economic relations may work against both their development and progress in terms of access to training, employment opportunities and participation in the social life of the region.

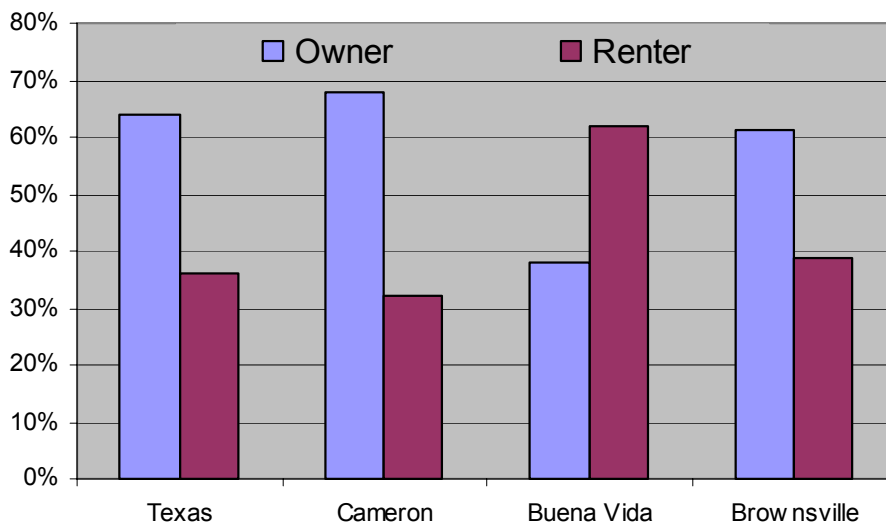
RESIDENTIAL PROFILE

Two proposed action items of the City of Brownsville’s 1994 HUD Enterprise Strategic Plan were the rehabilitation of substandard housing and the promotion of homeownership in the area which included Buena Vida. The means for the construction and rehabilitation of additional housing stocks in the targeted area was to be the Youth build Program and the Community Development Corporation of Brownsville. Neither of these enterprises is evident in the Buena Vida community as it relates to actual construction or rehabilitation of properties to a significant degree as of spring, 2003.

The Buena Vida neighborhood is one that is overwhelmingly renter base in its residential composition [Figure I and Table 10]. The state has a 36% renter base, Cameron County has a 32% renter base and the balance of Brownsville is 39% renter base, this community is comprised of a 62% renter base.

The Buena Vida neighborhood is one that is overwhelmingly renter base in its residential composition.

Figure I – Occupied Housing Units



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Table 10 – Occupied Housing Units

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Owner	64%	68%	38%	61%
Renter	36%	32%	62%	39%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

There is little home ownership in Buena Vida and several factors may be present to drive this situation, among those being:

- A housing stock that is not available for purchase on the open market.
- An orientation by property owners to rent rather than sell their long term income generating properties many of which are in dire need of repair and maintenance and which may be considered substandard.
- Lower property taxes that make it economically feasible for landlords to maintain ownership of income generating property rather than sell them [Table 14].
- The absence of sufficient housing stock to warrant a major financing program by either private or public financial institutions or not-for-profits agencies such as CDCB.
- The availability of rental units with fewer rooms that can be rented to as many individuals as the renters wish to accommodate [Table 15]
- Lower rental rates than the average for the region [Table 16]
- The availability of a very mobile renter base that can occupy a rental unit for a brief period and which allows for high turnover rates. This situation would appear to suit landlords since the tenure of occupants does not foster commitment toward either fixing or rehabilitating rental properties. This constant flux of renters may also provide the landlord the flexibility to keep the rents low to accommodate this constant flow.
- The presence of a large inventory of properties that may be considered substandard or dilapidated. The issue here is whether the City of Brownsville's building code and standards are being enforced to the degree that some of this properties could be condemned and razed to open up space for the construction of single family housing.
- The scarcity of a stable population that has the economic viability and resources to afford housing *even if it was readily available* [this issue will be delineated further in the economic overview of this report].

The City of Brownsville conducted a survey in 2001 [Table 11 and Map 1] in which it found that 32% of the structural conditions of houses and buildings was substandard and an additional 18% could be considered dilapidated. This condition will not have a positive impact on the quality of housing stock in this barrio unless these properties are condemned and construction/financing incentives are put in effect to attract new housing and homeowners.

Table 11 – Physical Condition of Structures in Buena Vida

Unit Type	Number	Percent
Public	7	1%
Semi-public	44	5%
Standard	320	35%
Substandard	290	32%
Dilapidated	168	18%
Parking or vacant	121	13%
Business	80	9%
TOTAL	909	100%

Source: City of Brownsville Housing Quality Survey, 2001

The Census Bureau [Table 12] provided the most recent data which shows that this community has significant shortcomings in the sanitary and hygienic facilities that are considered the standard for a typical residence. The absence of both plumbing [bathroom: partial or full] and of kitchen facilities [stove, sink, plumbing] is significant in that the health and nutrition of residents, especially children, is at significant risk to both short and long term diseases and illnesses. The research team, on its different excursions through the neighborhood, made note of the existences of some outhouses and exterior bathroom facilities. This condition is almost a historical footnote in the state and appears to be diminishing in both Cameron County and the balance of Brownsville as new or remodeled housing becomes more available on the market.

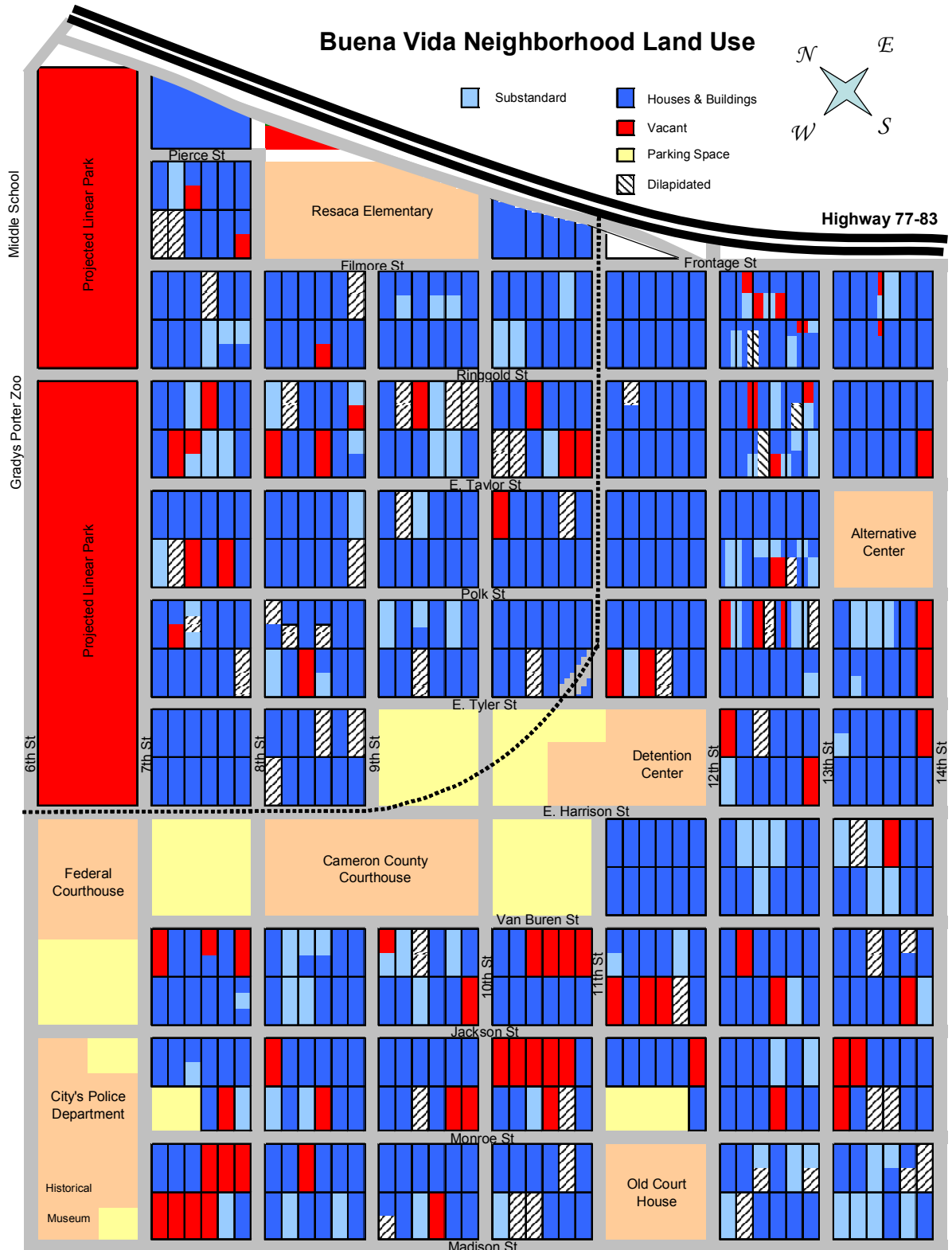
Table 12 – Lacking Complete Facilities

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Plumbing	1%	3%	10%	3%
Kitchen	1%	2%	11%	2%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

There appears to be a correlation between the number of substandard and dilapidated homes in this community and the participation rates in the federally subsidized Section 8 Rental Assistance Program which is administered by the Brownsville Housing Authority [Table 13].

Map 1 – Buena Vida Neighborhood Land Use



Source: CBIRD- UTB/TSC, 2003.

The participation rates in Section 8 housing assistance is not that much different between Buena Vida [7%] and the balance of Brownsville participation rate of 5%. These participation rates may be the result of the quality of housing that is evaluated and certified as meeting the standards for living accommodations as established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development - HUD. HUD requires local housing authorities to evaluate and certify all housing that is being considered for a Section 8 subsidy. In the case of Brownsville there are very few certified residential properties and only 46 families are currently using Section 8 assistance in the Buena Vida barrio.

Table 13 – Section 8 Housing Participation Rates

	Brownsville	Buena Vida	%
Total Families Served in 2003	1701	46	3%

Source: Brownsville Housing Authority, April 2003

Buena Vida has the lowest real estate tax value and tax rates when compared to Texas, Cameron County and the balance of Brownsville [Table 14]. The median value of Buena Vida real estate is \$23,800 less than the \$53,000 for both Cameron County and balance of Brownsville and \$53,300 less than the average for the state. The upper value of real estate in Buena Vida is not significantly higher than the lower values of both Cameron County [\$32,200] and the balance of Brownsville [\$36,200]. The low property assessment is indicative of:

- Property that is not being upgraded
- The absence of new construction of either single family or multi-families housing
- The scarcity of any rehabilitation of existing property, or
- The continued erosion of the quality of houses and buildings in the Buena Vida neighborhood.

Table 14 – Value (\$) for Specified Owner-Occupied Housing Units

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Lower value	52,900	34,200	22,500	36,200
Median value	82,500	53,000	29,200	53,000
Upper value	129,500	82,400	36,800	77,900

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

Buena Vida’s real estate is one which is composed of houses with a small number of rooms for residential occupancy [Table 15]. It should be noted that a one room residence consists of an area that is multi-functional in use to include living, dining, cooking and may or may not include bathroom facilities. The data from Table 15 show that this region [Cameron County, balance of Brownsville and Buena Vida] does not have many large multi-family apartment complexes or very large houses in stock.

Table 15 – Rooms per Housing Unit

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
1 room	2.5	2.9	5.4	3.6
2 rooms	6.3	9.7	17.2	10.5
3 rooms	12	17	20.3	18.4
4 rooms	16.3	20.8	26.2	17.8
5 rooms	22.5	23.3	14.4	22.9
6 rooms	18.1	14.2	10.7	14.8
7 or more	22.3	12.1	5.8	12.1

Source: U.S. Census, 2000.

The data show that this region [Cameron County, balance of Brownsville and Buena Vida] does not have many large multi-family apartment complexes or very large houses in stock.

The higher than the regional or state average of renters in Buena Vida may be linked to the low gross monthly rent costs of the existing properties. The small square footage size of the available rental properties along with a 52.6% rent of less than \$300 is inviting to a transit population that is not looking toward making a long term commitment to this community [Table 16].

Table 16 – Gross Rent

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Less than \$200	4.4	12.2	24.9	13.9
\$200 to \$299	4.7	13.9	27.7	14.1
\$300 to \$499	25.1	34.4	38	36.3
\$500 to \$749	37.1	22.7	4.6	22.8
\$750 to \$999	15.4	4.9	0	3.7
\$1,000 to \$1,499	6.3	1.3	0	1.3
\$1,500 or more	1.6	0.5	0	0.3
No cash rent	5.4	10.2	4.8	7.5

Source: U.S. Census, 2000.

This community’s short term tenure is also reflected in that 52% have resided at the same address for less than nine years [Table 17].The percentage, with tenure at the same address, begins to dissipate after the ninth year [5%] and at its highest level [21%] is still less than at the short

end of 27% at four years of tenure. These factors may be reflective of several considerations:

- The mobility of a population that is not committed to a long-term tenure within Buena Vida
- The absence of social and economic amenities and resources to anchor a family for a long term commitment
- The absence of social support services to supplement the needs of the families to attend to the basic requirements of a minimal quality of life
- The realization that there may be no options for homeownership within the Buena Vida and that those options may be available elsewhere in the region, state or even out of state
- The outward migration back to Mexico by the non-resident due to economic, social or cultural factors that mitigate against staying in the United States

Table 17 - Tenure of Residents

Number of years*	Percent
4	27
5-8	25
9-12	5
13-20	15
21-33	7
More than 33	21
*Years living at the same address	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

The continuing mobility and in-ward and out-ward migration of populations to the Buena Vida Neighborhood is further demonstrated in Table 18. Most of the variables related to residential status since 1995 are very similar for Cameron County, Balance of Brownsville and Buena Vida except for item #3 [residence in a different house elsewhere outside of the U.S.]. The Census Bureau data show that 11.5% of this community’s residents were living outside of the United States in 1995 whereas the percentages for such a cohort is nearly 50% lower in Cameron County [4%], balance of Brownsville [5.2%] and of Texas [3.8%]. This data indicates that the Buena Vida barrio is an attractive site for recent immigrants and this dynamic may be due to several factors:

- Its proximity to one of the four international bridges to Matamoros.
- The presence of an established immigrant population that has Binational roots and linkages back to Mexico which may serve as a

support base for newly arrived immigrants that may also have familial connections to Buena Vida.

- Again, the cost of rental property makes it an easy housing choice for those with limited financial resources.

Table 18 – Residential Status since 1995

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
1. Same house in 1995	49.6	58.5	55.7	57.6
2. Different house in the U.S. in 1995	46.6	37.5	32.7	37.3
Same county	27	28.2	26.1	30.7
Different county	19.6	9.3	6.6	6.5
Same state	12.5	5	5.8	3.8
Different state	7.1	4.3	0.8	2.7
3. Different house (Outside of U.S.) in 1995	3.8	4	11.5	5.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

The vacancy rates comparison [Table 19] provides data that illustrates two sides of the housing situation in Buena Vida. First, less than 2.2% [943] of Brownsville’s housing units [41,880] are located within this neighborhood. There is no evidence of any present or future construction of additional houses or apartments to add to the current low housing stock. Secondly, the vacancy rates also include 7% of properties that are considered to be abandoned so the availability ratio is even lower. Finally, the fact that the vacancy rates of Texas and Brownsville are identical may be a reflection of the tremendous growth within the city as part of Cameron County’s overall demographic growth of over 49% from 1990 to 2000.

Table 19 – Vacancy Rates

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Total Housing Units	8,157,575	119,654	943	41,880
Occupied Units	7,393,354	97,267	836	38,224
Vacant housing units	764,221	22,387	107	3,656
Vacancy Rate	9%	19%	11%	9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

There is homeownership in the Buena Vida neighborhood and its composition [Table 20] presents an interesting scenario to consider as housing options are evaluated for this community. The data shows that only 11.6% of homeowners in Buena Vida have an outstanding mortgage on their property and 88.4% does not have a mortgage. The residents, that are paying a fixed payment, are paying less that \$700 per month. The researchers believe that the 28% of the residents, with a residential tenure of over 21 years, [Table 14] are probably the majority of the 88.4% that do not have a mortgage payment and may have a clear deed and title to their homes.

Table 20 – Home Ownership Status

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
With a mortgage	64.2	45.5	11.6	48.5
Less than \$300	0.5	0.9	1.8	0.4
\$300 to \$499	4.3	6.3	3.6	5.3
\$500 to \$699	9.7	12.1	4.4	13.8
\$700 to \$999	18.4	15	0	17.2
\$1,000 to \$1,499	18.5	7.7	0	8.8
\$1,500 to \$1,999	7.2	2.4	0	2.3
\$2,000 or more	5.6	1.1	1.8	0.7
Not mortgaged	35.8	54.5	88.4	51.5

Source: U.S. Census, 2000.

88.4% of the owned property, within the Buena Vida community, does not have a mortgage and residents that are paying a fixed payment are paying less that \$700 per month.

The data [Table 21] also show that 81% of owned housing is valued at less than \$40,000 by the tax assessor. The present socio-economic index of this neighborhood will not add value to Brownsville’s tax base in return for the investment that is made in its development

Table 21 – Value for Owner-Occupied Housing Units

	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Less than \$10,000	2%	3%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	8%	2%
\$15,000 to \$19,999	6%	3%
\$20,000 to \$24,999	18%	5%
\$25,000 to \$29,999	19%	7%
\$30,000 to \$34,999	15%	7%
\$35,000 to \$39,999	13%	9%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	8%	14%
\$50,000 to \$59,999	0%	10%
\$60,000 to \$69,999	3%	11%
\$70,000 to \$99,999	2%	18%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	1%	6%
\$150,000 to \$174,999	4%	2%
\$175,000 to \$399,999	0%	3%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

The present socio-economic index of this neighborhood will not add value to Brownsville’s tax base in return for the investment that is made in its development.

The data represented in **Table 22** demonstrates that construction of new residences in Buena Vida has dwindled to less than 12 houses in the 1999-2000 period while in the balance of Brownsville 1,367 houses were built during the same period. Essentially the majority, [53%] of the residences in this neighborhood, were constructed prior to 1959. These same properties are beginning to show their age.

The housing boom in Brownsville was most apparent during the twenty year period covering the two decades of the 1970’s and 1980’s when 46% of the residences were constructed. Since over 80% of the houses in Buena Vida do not have a mortgage [**Table 20**] then it can be inferred that most of those properties were developed prior to 1959. Some of the present owners, who may be landlords, may have inherited these properties or if they are the original owners then make up the elderly cohort of this barrio’s residents. A final observation here: there may never be another period of massive construction, by Buena Vida standards, in this community because of the corollary issues that have been delineated.

Essentially the majority, 53% of the residences in this neighborhood, were constructed prior to 1959. These same properties are beginning to show their age.

Table 22 – Year of Construction

	Buena Vida		Brownsville	
Number of Housing Units in 2000	943		41,880	
Built 1999 to March 2000	12	1%	1,367	3%
Built 1995 to 1998	49	5%	5,016	12%
Built 1990 to 1994	27	3%	4,267	10%
Built 1980 to 1989	136	14%	9,987	24%
Built 1970 to 1979	87	9%	9,384	22%
Built 1960 to 1969	134	14%	4,802	11%
Built 1950 to 1959	126	13%	3,469	8%
Built 1940 to 1949	197	21%	2,025	5%
Built 1939 or earlier	175	19%	1,563	4%

Source: U.S. Census 2000.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS:

The residential characteristics and status of housing in this community leads to the following observations:

- Since the majority of residents are renters there is no accumulated equity to provide the capital that families need to have some flexibility or options in their finances or capacity to purchase property.

- The housing in this community is old and 50% is either evaluated as substandard or dilapidated leading to a neighborhood that is in the state of constant erosion as is any shoreline without a retaining barrier.
- The fact that an overwhelming majority, over 80%, of the properties are held with clear title of ownership and no mortgage payments, only perpetuates the landlord and renter relationship.
- There are no economic incentives for property owners to sell their properties or to rehabilitate them due to a constantly mobile renter population that is willing to tolerate bad living conditions in return for low rents.
- There does not appear to be much building code enforcement by the City that would lead to either the rehabilitation or condemnation of rental property by the city. This status quo results in the scarcity of land for sale for new construction and the perpetuation of squalor in a downtown neighborhood.
- There will never be any multi-family apartment complexes constructed in this neighborhood due to the scarcity of sufficient contiguous property.
- There may never be any significant single family homes constructed since there are no economic incentives, motivation or willingness by landlords to sell their debt free and income generating properties.
- The limited homeownership options that are available to current renters will continue to foster the out-migration that is the rule for this barrio.
- The low gross rent will continue to draw a population that sees the Buena Vida barrio is one that will incubate them for a time that is sufficient for them to get acclimated and settled in without making a commitment to the community.
- The substandard and dilapidated housing stock in this community impedes the participation of potentially qualified families in the federally subsidized Section 8 rental assistance program that is administered by the Brownsville Housing Authority.

The fact that an overwhelming majority, over 80%, of the properties are held with clear title of ownership and no mortgage payments, only perpetuates the landlord and renter relationship.

- The typical Buena Vida resident does not reflect an economic profile or the means to qualify for housing loans unless they are subsidized by a government agency or a private concern.
- The assessed value of Buena Vida property is rather low in comparison to the rest of Brownsville and the return to investment may cause city government to reconsider its commitment to this barrio's infrastructure when demands are coming from high growth areas elsewhere and away from downtown.
- More Buena Vida properties will begin to show wear and tear that will demonstrate the age of the property and the unwillingness of owners to invest in either new construction or rehabilitation of existing properties.
- The proximity of this barrio to the Mexican border and specifically to Matamoros will continue to make it one of the preferences for first point of contact for immigrants who may already have a familial affinity to the neighborhood.

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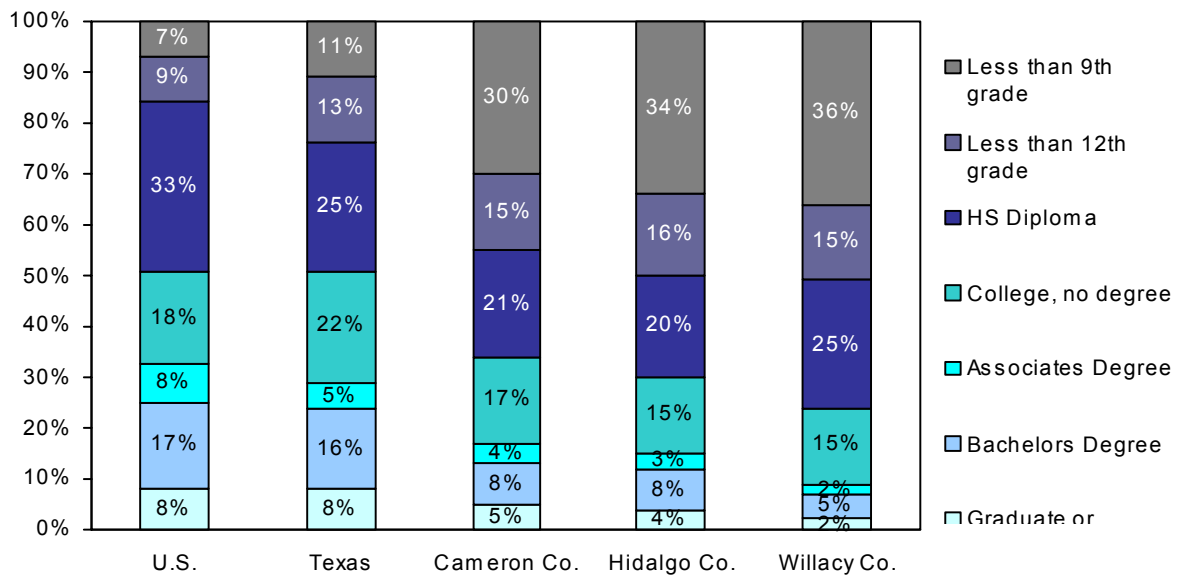
EDUCATIONAL PROFILE

Writing in the Work of Nations (1991), former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich states that, “each nation’s primary assets will be its citizens’ skills and insights. Each nation’s primary political task which tear at the ties binding citizens together-bestowing ever greater wealth on the most skilled and insightful, while cosigning the less skilled to a declining standard of living.” The nexus to continue a personal and collective uninterrupted cycle of capacity building we contend is education. Without the ability to read, compute or write in any language, especially in English here in the United States, one is relegated to the periphery of the social benefits that come with economic mobility that is grounded in education.

The status of the educational foundations of this region is horrific at its worst and dismal at its best. The CBIRD benchmarking report (2003) analyzed data from the 2000 U.S. Census and for this region it showed that it is not collectively ready for the demands of a national and binational economy that demands a highly literate and technologically prepared workforce [Figure J].

The nexus to continue a personal and collective continuous cycle of capacity building we contend is education.

Figure J - Comparative Education Attainment (Population 25 & Older)



Source: U.S. Census Data 2000

The data show that 30% of Cameron County have not completed 9th grade, four times the national rate. An additional 15% have not completed high school so that makes for a 45% rate that has less than a high school

diploma. These are not the ingredients that make for an agenda directed toward a future shared prosperity. Add to this mixture a population of students that is 84% economically disadvantaged [Figure J] and the assets for a progressive educational framework to anchor the region's economy continue to erode.

As has been previously noted, the social indicators to measure development in Buena Vida are a micro reflection of those present in both Cameron County and the balance of the city of Brownsville. Of the population 25 years or older, 49.6% has less than a 9th grade education and 24.2% never received their high school diploma. These two cohorts represent 73.8% of the population that has less than a high school education [Table 23]. Cameron County fares a bit better in that 44.8% of its population has less than a high school education while the balance of Brownsville's educational attainment is at 48.4% or almost identical to the county's.

The percentage of high school graduate or higher, including professional school is 26.1% for Buena Vida, 51.7% for the balance of Brownsville and 55.2% for Cameron County. All of these figures are significantly lower than the rest of the state and demonstrate a very high attrition rate or one which is consistently different and much higher than is reported by the Texas Education Agency.

The reported data provides a definitive description of the education status of the community that is in the attendance zones of either Resaca or Putegnat Elementary Schools. The educational attainment of this community is such that its residents are ill prepared to participate in or benefit from workforce training directed toward economic development without the benefit of much precursor literacy, adult basic education and overall language skills development. With Spanish being the dominant language there is much pre-cursor training needed in English as a Second Language, Adult Basic Education, basic literacy and GED instruction that would prepare these residents to become economically viable participants in the workplace.

The educational attainment of this community is such that its residents are ill prepared to participate in or benefit from workforce training directed toward economic development without the benefit of much precursor literacy, adult basic education and overall language skills development.

Table 23 – Educational Attainment

	Texas		Cameron		Buena Vida		Brownsville	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Population*	12,790,893		187,064		2,200		76,081	
Less than 9th grade	1,465,420	12	54,954	29	1,092	50	24,165	32
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	1,649,141	13	28,762	15	533	24	12,597	17
High school graduate or GED	3,176,743	25	37,615	20	257	12	13,053	17
Some college, no degree	2,858,802	22	32,734	18	179	8	12,799	17
Associate degree	668,494	5	8,014	4	62	3	3,263	4
Bachelor's degree	1,996,250	16	15,785	8	47	2	6,293	8
Graduate or professional degree	976,043	8	9,200	5	30	1	3,911	5
% high school graduate or higher	9,676,332	76	103,348	55	575	26	39,319	52
%bachelor's degree or higher	2,972,293	23	24,985	13	77	4	10,204	13
*Population 25 years and over								

Source: U.S. Census, 2000

The two elementary schools that host the majority of the enrollment from the Buena Vida neighborhood are Putegnat and Resaca. The cumulative enrollment at any level of education from Buena Vida is 1,008. There are 661 students enrolled in these two elementary schools. There are also 259 students that attend high schools in Brownsville and 88 students that are enrolled in a college/university or in a graduate school [Table 24] from this barrio.

Table 24 – 2000 School Enrollments

	Texas		Cameron		Buena Vida		Brownsville		
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
*Enrollment	5,948,260		109,790		1,008		48,181		
Nursery or preschool	390,094	7	7,102	7	66	7	3,040	6	
Kindergarten	348,203	6	7,554	7	107	11	3,407	7	
Elementary (grades 1-8)	2,707,281	46	52,200	48	488	48	22,217	46	
High school (grades 9-12)	1,299,792	22	26,212	24	259	26	11,123	23	
College or graduate sch.	1,202,890	20	16,722	15	88	9	8,394	17	
Buena Vida's Elementary School Enrollment					661	63			
Students attending Putegnat or Resaca from outside Buena Vida					388	37			
Total (Resaca & Putegnat) Enrollment					1049				

***Population 3 years and over enrolled in school**

Source: U.S. Census, 2000 and Texas Education Agency AEIS, 1999-2000

If there is a beacon of hope for the future in this community it is situated in its two elementary schools. There is much going here that relates to both the students in the classrooms and the active participation of their families in the schools. Both of these schools have outstanding family development programs that provide ESL, ABE and social skills instruction to an enrollment that is predominately female since the men are working. There is also a presence of a technologically oriented curriculum based in two state of the art computer laboratories at both schools that were connected by T-One lines which provide high speed internet access.

If there is a beacon of hope for the future in this community it is situated in its two elementary schools.

Both of the principals of these schools shared their frustrations with the general state of their service area. The principal of one of the two elementary schools in Buena Vida remarked that, “we have to recreate the 3rd, 4th and 5th grade every two or three years due to the outward migration of children from this community to some place else.” This observation confirms the loss of population that has been previously cited. Another issue of concern to the principals was the availability of health and safety programs to serve their children.

One observation was that the quality of the substandard and dilapidated housing has been noted by the home visitation staffs that visit the homes of children who are absent for a significant number of class days. They alluded to the squalor and the absence of furniture and common household

amenities such as bathrooms or kitchens and the overcrowded conditions of these homes.

Both elementary school principals spoke of the despair and sense of hopelessness in some families whose females are in physically abusive situations with their spouses. Sometimes these schools are seen as havens or refuge for both children and some parents because there is simply no where else to turn to for counseling or intervention services. The affinity of the teachers, staff and administration for the Buena Vida families and children was very evident during the course of the site visits.

There was much obvious pride in the presence of chess teams at both schools and also of the outstanding academic achievement at both schools [Table 25]. Both of these elementary schools are rated as exemplary by both the Brownsville Independent School District [BISD] and the Texas Education Agency. The scores at both schools on the TAAS [Texas Assessment of Academic Skills] during school year 2001-2002 show that both Resaca and Putegnat outperformed both the district and the state in terms of average scores. Both Resaca and Putegnat have reading scores that were almost identical and higher than the BISD's by 7 points and the state's by 2 points.

Another remarkable achievement, at these two elementary schools, is reflected in the math scores. The students at both Resaca and Putegnat out-paced the TAAS scores at the state level by an average of nearly five points and the BISD by over 7 average points. What is present is an integrated family development program with activities that allowed family members, mostly females, to participate and be present at the schools. Also, the use of technology is at the maximum with the use of the computer laboratories at both schools. Finally, the principals, teachers and support staff were passionate about the students and their students. The demonstrated positive outcomes are not accidental, incidental or serendipitous but may reflect the attention that is directed toward learners first and foremost and the consideration extended to their families.

There was a gap in the difference between the apparent achievement of students and a non-corresponding participation in the "Gifted and Talented Education" programs of the school district [Table 26]. Putegnat had less than a 1% participation rate and Resaca was also low at 3.10% while the school district's rate was not remarkably higher at 5.4%. The participation rate of both schools in bilingual and English as a Second Language instruction is extreme when compared to the rates at both the District and the state. Resaca's ESL/Bilingual rates (80.4%) and Putegnat's (59.6%) were over 20 to 30 points greater than the school district's and over 45 to 67 points greater than the balance of the state. It can be inferred that this

Both elementary school principals spoke of the despair and sense of hopelessness in some families whose females are in physically abusive situations with their spouses.

data reinforces the data on home language usage that was presented in **Table 9**.

When students are surrounded by a predominately single language environment, such as Spanish at home, then its impact on learning and instruction will be evident in the classroom. It is apparent that the dominance of Spanish in the home did not negatively impact student performance at either Resaca or Putegnat. This issue is one that can best be addressed by researchers in the areas of bilingual and ESL instruction than by this research team.

Table 25 – TAAS Percent Passing Rates

	Resaca	Putegnat	BISD*	State
Reading	93.2	93.0	86.0	91.3
Math	97.9	96.9	90.1	92.7
Writing	94.7	93.3	84.1	88.7

*Brownsville Independent School District

Source: Texas Education Agency AEIS, 1999-2000

It is apparent that the dominance of Spanish in the home did not negatively impact student performance at either Resaca or Putegnat.

Table 26 – Student Enrollment by Program

	Putegnat	Resaca	BISD*	Texas
Bilingual/ESL	80.40%	59.60%	39.50%	13.10%
Gifted & Talented Education	0.80%	3.10%	5.40%	8.20%
Special Education	13.20%	10.90%	11.60%	11.70%

*Brownsville Independent School District

Source: Texas Education Agency AEIS, 1999-2000

There is evidence [Table 27] that there are some residents of this neighborhood that are participating in post-secondary education. 9% of the residents are enrolled in either an undergraduate, graduate or professional school course of study. The data does not tell us whether these participants are long term residents of this community or simply renting a residence while they pursue their studies.

Table 27 – Post-Secondary Education Participation Rates

	Buena Vida	Brownsville
College or graduate school	8.7	17.4
Population 3 years and over		

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

What was apparent to the researchers was the presence of an integrated family development program with activities that allowed family members, mostly females, to participate and be present at the schools. When data from the school district’s Parental Involvement Department was analyzed [Table 28] it showed that the participation rates for both Resaca and Putegnat, in the parent learning network, were the highest of any of the schools within the same attendance zone. This fact was reinforced by site visits to the schools where parents were actively involved in the family development activities and fully participating.

Table 28 – Parent Learning Network

	2003 Students Enrollment	Parents Attendance
PORTER	1956	356
CUMMINGS	914	360
FAULK	898	224
PUTEGNAT	585	1372
RESACA	354	395
SHARP	488	247

Meeting held from 9/16/2002 to 1/31/2003

Source: BIRD Parental Involvement Report, January 2003

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS:

In most demographic studies and reports, the age cohort over 25 years of age is used as the baseline to gauge many economic, health, employment and educational measures of success. When one evaluates this same age cohort within the context of the Buena Vida barrio’s educational profile, it has been found sorely lacking. With 73% of the residents lacking a high school education this community is becoming further isolated from the economic mainstream that requires solid educational credentials. If we are to heed Robert Reich’s admonishments, then something must be done to expand the knowledge and intellectual capital of this barrio otherwise it will continue to be relegated to a “declining standard of living.” Furthermore, without an educational base any community will not be able to participate in the cycle of continuous capacity building and participation

in the social life of the greater community. There are however other insights about the educational profile of this barrio and some of those are:

- The provision of instructional services to elementary school children is in the capable administration of two outstanding schools: the Resaca Elementary School and Putegnat Elementary Schools. These two schools have been rated exemplary by both the Texas Education Agency and the Brownsville Independent School District. This is the highest level of distinction in educational outcomes that a school may receive in Texas.
- The two elementary schools are achieving at higher levels, when measured by the TAAS scores, than are peer schools both within Brownsville and the state. These outcomes may reflect both the outstanding classroom instruction which is matched by the high participation rates of parents in the schools' family development activities.
- The two elementary schools have become de facto community support service centers as they have responded to the ongoing needs of the families by fully implementing the school district's Parent Learning Network.
- Both elementary schools provide consistent and ongoing family development services, English as a Second Language Instruction, Adult Basic Education and informal family outreach through their home visitation program.
- The elementary schools are making maximum use of fully integrated and internet connected computer laboratories that are linked to classroom instruction.
- Of concern to the principals is the constant inward and outward migration of families with school age children from the neighborhood which results in the recreation of three grades cohorts every three years, especially at Putegnat.
- The principals also shared their concern about the lack of a support service network to assist both students and their families with after school programs and family development services.
- One of the principals remarked about what may be considered a high spousal abuse rate within his service area. All too often the schools have been seen as havens by abused females that had no where else to turn to. It was obvious to the researcher that the

The two elementary schools have become de facto community support service centers as they have responded to the ongoing needs of the families by fully implementing the school district's Parent Learning Network.

- principal was really troubled and concerned about the lack of family support networks within Buena Vida.
- Another concern was the substandard and dilapidated housing that the families of children that attend Resaca and Putegnat live in. The home visitation teams have related the inadequate home conditions that they found in which many families lacked the basic amenities such as furniture, cooking areas or basic hygiene facilities such as bathrooms.
 - There are some Buena Vida residents that are attending post-secondary institutions but it could not be determined if they were either long time residents or just renters that had found accessible housing near the university.
 - There is no evidence of any workforce or economic development training activities that are situated within the barrio. This may be an opportunity that needs further consideration by the University of Texas and Texas Southmost College due to the proximity of the neighborhood and the presence of an at-risk population that could benefit from ABE, ESL and employment directed training.

ECONOMIC PROFILE

Porter (1995) has posed the question: “How can inner city businesses and nearby employment opportunities for inner city residents proliferate and grow?” Of concern to Porter is that there be a discernable and sustainable economic base in the inner city that reflects private, for-profit initiatives and investment based on economic self-interest and genuine competitive advantage-not through artificial inducements, charity, or government mandates. [para-phrased] These economic and community development perspectives will be revisited later after the economic data on Buena Vida is described in this section.

While there is private enterprise within Buena Vida, little of it appears to involve its residents. This is a community that has 842 residents available for the labor force or 29.8% of the population and of these, 583 are employed while 259 are not employed [Table 29]. The balance, 1,985 residents is not in the labor force and this could be due to the following reasons:

- Retired
- Disabled, unable to work [receiving Medicare Medicaid benefits]
- In school [of school attendance age]
- Head of household unable to work and raising the family
- Unable to find employment
- Working on a cash wages basis and income is not unreported
- Working illegally, without a resident card [not reporting income]
- Working out of home and on a cash unreported income basis

Table 29 – Employment Status

	Texas		Cameron		Buena Vida		Brownsville	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
In labor force	9,937,150	64	123,112	53	842	30	50,622	52
Civilian labor force	9,830,559	63	122,909	53	842	30	50,545	52
Employed	9,234,372	59	108,904	47	583	21	43,989	46
Unemployed	596,187	4	14,005	6	259	9	6,556	7
Armed Forces	106,591	1	203	0	0	0	77	0
Not in labor force	5,680,223	36	111,099	47	1,985	70	46,025	48
Population 16 years and over								

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

The data in **Table 29** continues to reflect the micro and macro relationships between the Buena Vida community and the balance of

Brownsville and Cameron County but to a more extreme case. Both Cameron County and the City of Brownsville demonstrate greater non-labor force participation rates than the balance of the state and higher unemployable rates. The unemployed rates for Buena Vida is greater than for both Cameron County and balance of Brownsville and the state’s unemployed rate was lower than all three local cohorts. Also, the percentage of employed individuals is almost identical for both the balance of the City of Brownsville and Cameron County and reflects rates lower than the state’s average.

Table 30 provides data that show that Buena Vida has a significantly lower professional/management employee core than either the state, Cameron County or the balance of Brownsville. This data may be misleading since there may not to be a correlation between employment in the neighborhood and residency in Buena Vida.

Table 30 – Employment by Occupation

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Management/professional	33.3%	27.7%	12.3%	27.6%
Service	14.6%	19.8%	28.1%	18.5%
Sales & office	27.2%	24.9%	25.9%	26.7%
Farming, fishing, & forestry	0.7%	1.4%	2.1%	1.0%
Construction & maintenance	10.9%	10.4%	9.4%	9.4%
Production, transportation, & mtrls moving	13.2%	15.8%	22.1%	16.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

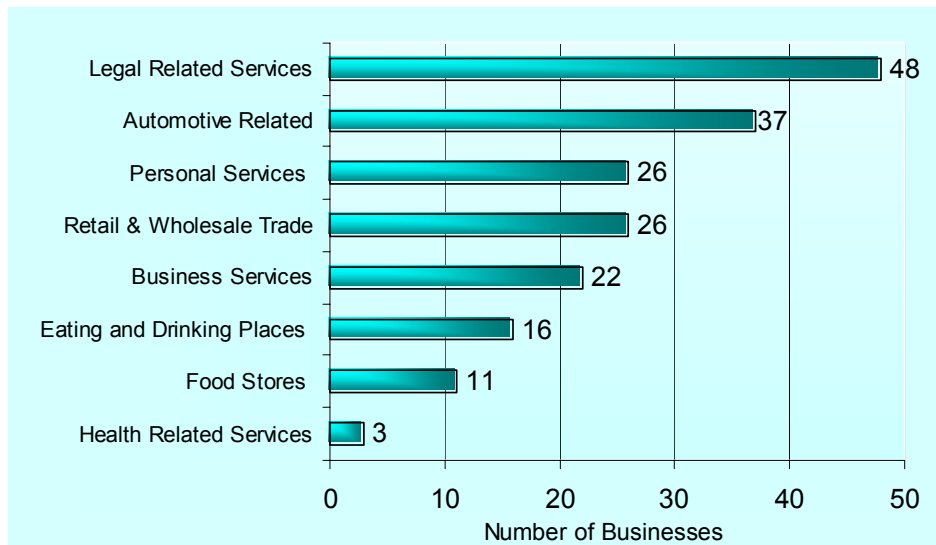
The researchers could not locate a data base with updated information on the types and numbers of businesses that are located within the geographic parameters of the Buena Vida neighborhood. Visits and calls to the regional offices of the Office of the Texas State Comptroller and the Brownsville Office of the Tax Assessor yielded little results. The researchers decided to undertake an on-site survey and census of each business in this community by conducting a block by block count, street location and type of business designation to come up with a status report on the business community. These activities resulted in the data that is represented in **Figure K, Figure L and Figure M.**

The data show that there is a large concentration of legal related services that provide support to the judicial professions, county and city jails, the county, state and federal courts and of course legal representation to select clients. Most of these legal services [attorneys, notary publics, bail bonding establishment and CPA's] are located off Van Buren, Tyler, Harrison and Jackson streets [Figure K and Map 2].

The majority of legal related services are attorneys whose offices are near both the federal courthouse on 7th at Van Buren and a large concentration of notary public and income tax and CPA's on Van Buren, Jackson and Monroe streets. The bail bonds businesses are within close proximity of the county jail and courthouse which are located off Van Buren and 8th, 9th and 10th streets.

The balance of the businesses, other than the automobile related ones, represent a base of small, non-franchised and family owned businesses such as corner stores (tienditas), bakeries, coin laundries, cleaners, alternations and tailor shops, some used clothing stores and some small clinics along with some small walk-up eating places but no large restaurants.

Figure K– Buena Vida Businesses Inventory



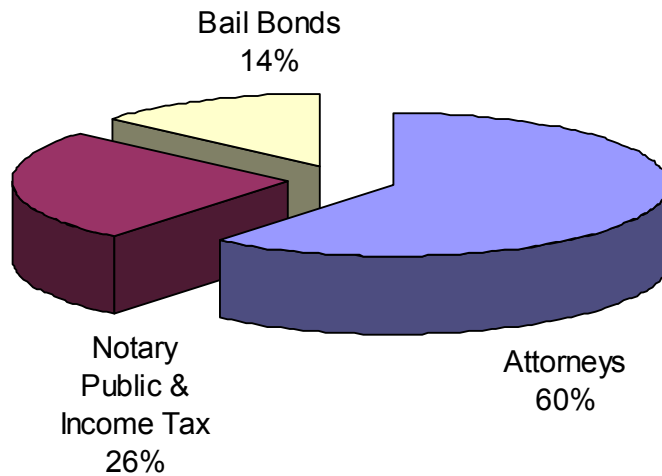
Source: Texas State Comptroller's Office & CBIRD-UTB/TSC, 2003

Map 2



Source: CBIRD- UTB/TSC, 2003.

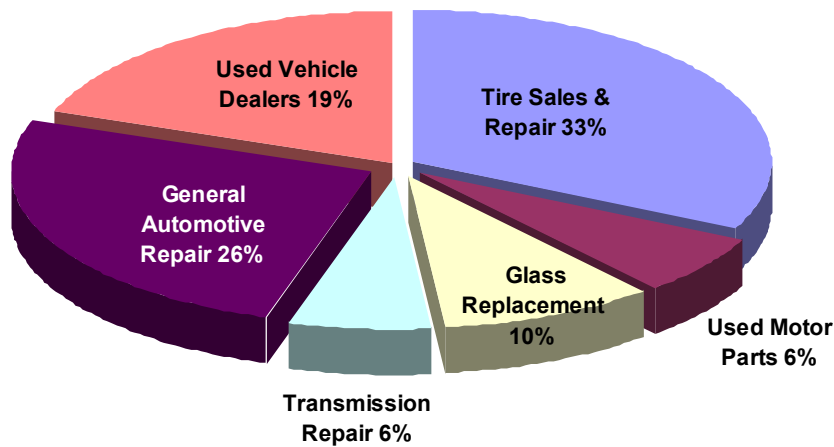
Figure L - Legal Services Related Businesses



Source: Texas State Comptroller's Office & CBIRD-UTB/TSC, 2003

The second highest concentration of employment is within automotive services which consist mainly of auto repair, auto body and transmission repairs shops closer to 12th, 13th and 14th street and International Boulevard [Figure M].

Figure M - Automobile Related Businesses



Source: Texas State Comptroller's Office & CBIRD-UTB/TSC, 2003

Whatever the employment may be for the residents of Buena Vida, the data shows that they are not making much in terms of earnings when compared to the state and to the regional populations. **Tables 31 and 32** show a Buena Vida population that earned, in 1999 dollars, less than \$10,000 annually which is on average less than the \$14,309 of Cameron County residents and the \$13,437 of Balance of Brownsville residents.

Whatever the employment may be for the residents of Buena Vida, the data shows that they are not making much in terms of earnings when compared to the state and to the regional populations.

The state’s median earnings were \$22,142 or approximately 44% more annually. As appears to be the national norm, females earned else at all tiers but to a greater extreme in Buena Vida where they earned a median income of \$7,696.

Table 31 – Median Earnings in 1999 (dollars) by Gender

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Total	22,142	14,309	9,793	13,437
Male	26,690	16,544	10,654	15,925
Female	17,658	11,871	7,696	11,448
% of female vs. male earnings	66%	72%	72%	72%

Population 16 years and over with earnings
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Table 32 – Household Income in 1999

Income	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Less 10K	10.4%	18.9%	48.1%	21.3%
10-14K	6.6%	10.7%	17.3%	11.1%
15-24K	13.6%	18.4%	14.8%	18.5%
25-34K	13.5%	14.3%	9.1%	13.7%
35-49K	16.5%	14.7%	3.3%	14.2%
50-74K	18.4%	13.0%	4.1%	12.0%
75-99K	9.5%	5.3%	1.4%	5.1%
100-149K	7.2%	3.2%	1.2%	2.9%
150-199K	2.1%	0.6%	0.0%	0.5%
>200K	2.2%	0.1%	0.6%	0.8%

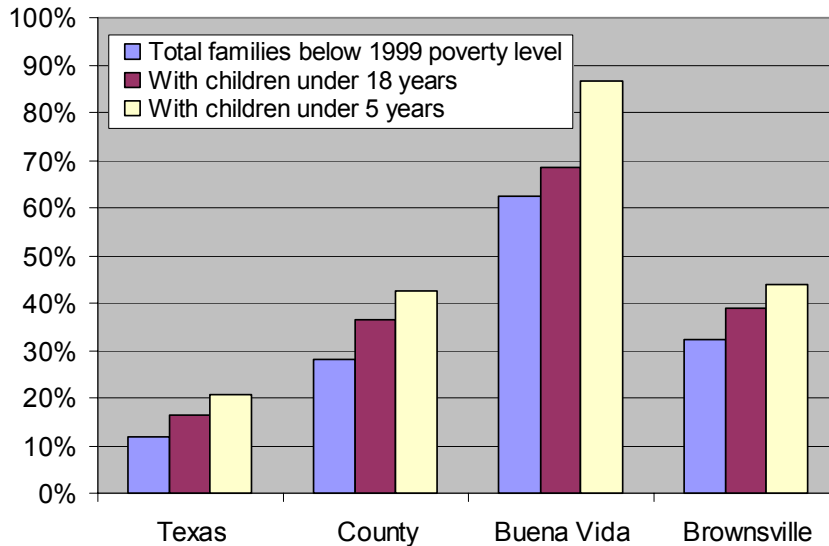
(K)=Thousands \$
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

With this income base very few, if any, of the residents of Buena Vida are in an economic position to assume mortgages or pay higher rents than have been shown as the norm for the neighborhood [Table 16].

The Children's Defense Fund (2002) ranked Brownsville at the top of the list of United States cities with high child poverty rates [Figure N]. The 2000 Census reported the city’s poverty rate at 45.3 %. Within this barrio, families living under poverty accounted for 63% of the households, while families with children under 18 are reported to be at 68% poverty rate.

Within this community, families living under poverty accounted for 63% of the households, while families with children under 18 reported a 68% poverty rate.

Figure N – 1999 Poverty Status



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Additionally, an inordinate percentage (45%) of households does not demonstrate any wage or salary income [Table 33].

Table 33 – Wages or Salary Income in 1999 for Households

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
With wage or salary income	81%	73%	55%	76%
No wage or salary income	19%	27%	45%	24%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

The data [Table 34] show that residents in this neighborhood are receiving, on an average, at almost twice the Cameron County’s [10%] and balance of Brownsville’s average [12%] of public assistance and almost four times the state’s average [3%]. What was evident to the researchers was the scarcity of a support services network to provide economic and personal development resources to increase the residents’ capacity to participate in the social mainstream. Another glaring issue seems to be the absence of an active and participatory role by the businesses that are located within this neighborhood to affect the quality of life of the community

What was evident to the researchers was the scarcity of a support services network to provide economic and personal development resources to increase the residents’ capacity to participate in the social mainstream.

Table 34 – Public Assistance Income in 1999 for Households

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Receiving public assistance	3%	10%	23%	12%
No public assistance	97%	90%	77%	88%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

There are two items of interest, as one looks at the mobility of the residents of Buena Vida, which may explain much about their economic and social wherewithal. **Table 35** provides data that show that a disproportionate number of both homeowners and renters do not have vehicles to provide a means of daily transportation. In this barrio³ 33% of homeowners and 53% of renters do not own vehicles. These numbers represent lower level compared to the region’s and state’s averages.

Table 35 – Vehicles Available by Occupied Housing Unit

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Owner				
occupied:	4,717,294	65,854	317	23,453
No vehicle	4%	7%	33%	8%
1 vehicle	27%	35%	44%	32%
2 vehicles	48%	42%	13%	42%
3 vehicles	16%	12%	9%	13%
Renter				
occupied:	2,676,060	31,413	519	14,771
No vehicle	14%	21%	53%	24%
1 vehicle	52%	50%	40%	49%
2 vehicles	28%	24%	6%	23%
3 vehicles	5%	4%	0%	4%
4 vehicles	1%	0%	1%	1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

The cost of vehicles may be prohibitive to households with a precarious economic means. The proximity of the amenities that are necessary for these households are within walking distance of less than a half-mile’s distance. The downtown area, with a large grocery store along with

³ In this report Barrio, Community and Neighborhood are used interchangeably.

assorted and diverse clothing and general merchandisers, is no more than a twenty minute walk.

There is a Brownsville Urban System bus hub in the downtown government district and bus schedules are adequate to meet the needs of the residents should they have travel outside of the barrio. The downtown bus hub provides access to buses and vans that can take riders to all points in the Rio Grande Valley through the Valley Transit Company and within Texas and other points through Greyhound Buses. Expreso, Tornado and Adame Bus Companies and Piporro Vans also provide connections to may points in both the United States and Mexico. Also, all government agencies are located within a one mile radius of any radius in Buena Vida as is the main bridge to cross over to Matamoros.

The non-vehicular reliance of this community is even more pronounced when data that show commuting options is evaluated [Table 36]. 28% of Buena Vida’s residents rely on public transportation, walked, worked at home or used other means, such as bicycles, to get to work. The same data for Cameron County (7.4%) and balance of Brownsville (7.3%) is identical and clearly demonstrates a more mobile population that relies on individually owned vehicles to get to work.

A visual tour of this community shows much pedestrian traffic to the schools, parks, corner stores, to and from neighbors, to the government complexes and even to Mexico. Also present are numbers of discarded shopping carts that are left in front of residences and on the streets. On occasion one may see a truck from the largest of the grocery store chains going through the neighborhood picking up discarded shopping carts and taking them back to the downtown store.

Table 36 – Commuting to Work

	Texas	Cameron	Buena Vida	Brownsville
Car, truck, or van -- drove alone	77.7	73.2	52.7	71.7
Car, truck, or van -- carpooled	14.5	19.4	18.7	21.1
Public transportation	1.9	0.8	5.5	1.3
Walked	1.9	2.3	17.8	2.2
Other means	1.3	1.8	2.3	1.6
Worked at home	2.8	2.5	3	2.2

Workers 16 years and over

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS:

As **Porter (1996)** has previously noted, the well-being of America's inner cities is linked to their economic capacity which results in a continuing framework for a sustainable community development. The data, both statistical and observational, show the Buena Vida barrio to be one that is becoming more insulated from the economic mainstream of Brownsville. Among the most telling items about this community's economic scenery are the following:

- There is evidence of private enterprise within this barrio but most of it is at its fringes and also seems to involve little of the residents in the employment network.
- The legal businesses makes the highest concentration of employers and occupants of office space and they are located away from the center of the community and adjoin the municipal, county, state and federal legal and judicial complexes along 7th street, Van Buren, Jackson, Harrison and Tyler streets. These businesses can be grouped into three main categories:
 1. Attorneys
 2. Bail Bond Operations
 3. Notary Publics and Income Tax Services
- The next highest concentration of employment is automotive related and much of it is manual labor in mechanical, transmission and electrical work.
- The personal services and retail shops are small laundries, tailor shops, used clothing stores with no large stores or franchises within the community.
- The food stores are "tienditas" or neighborhood grocery stores with the largest being the Lopez Supermarket on the corner of Ringgold and 14th street. The eating establishments are generally small in size and many can be classified as taquerias.
- The health services businesses are not full medical services clinics but rather are referral sites to health services outside of the barrio.
- The non-labor participation rate for this community is extremely high when compared to the regional and Texas rates.

- The actual number of barrio residents in the labor force is less than 850 and only 583 of these are employed.
- The data indicates that the workforce of this community is not in the “white collar” professions but rather heavily concentrated in manual labor in support of the service and transportation industries.
- There is no data that would support any statement to the fact that this barrio’s residents are actively employed within the community.
- The residents that are employed do not fare very well in terms of median earnings in that collectively they make less than the annual median earnings of a resident of Matamoros. The female workers are earning \$2,097 less annually than their male counterparts.
- Of particular concern to elected officials and policy brokers should be the fact that 48% of Buena Vida households have less than a \$10,000 annual income.
- The poverty rate for this barrio is dismal. As previously noted, the city of Brownsville was ranked at the top of the list of the most impoverished cities in America by the Children’s Defense Fund in 2002. The poverty rate for Buena Vida residents is greater than that of the balance of Brownsville with 68% of children under 18 years of age living at or below the poverty standard.
- This community has a high number of residents receiving public assistance by a 50% higher rate than the region and at a nearly 8 times greater rate than the state.
- When one looks at mobility as an essential element of economic means the data show that Buena Vida residents rely on public transportation or other means to get to their jobs than any other residents of this region. Of the renters, over 53% do not have a vehicle and of the property owners, 33% do not own a vehicle.
- This is a walking neighborhood. Buena Vida residents walk at a 10 times greater rate than both the residents of the region or the state.

CRIMINAL ACTIVITY PROFILE

The crime data base from the Brownsville Police Department was used to develop a profile of the criminal activity in the Buena Vida neighborhood. It is this data that presents one of the most disturbing characteristic of this community. Buena Vida has about 2.1% of the population of the City of Brownsville yet its criminal activities are very disproportionate in terms of the ratio between population and numbers and types of crime. Data presented in Table 37 show that 6% of all crime in Brownsville occurred in this community. Of greater concern is the fact that a large percent of the crimes were of a violent nature.

Table 37 – 1999-2002 Buena Vida Crime Index as a Percentage of Brownsville Crime

Crime	1999		2000		2001		2002	
		%		%		%		%
Murder (Felony I)	1	25%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%
RAPE	12	46%	12	41%	23	85%	29	91%
ROBBERY	12	7%	12	7%	7	4%	13	7%
AGG/ASSAULT	46	8%	31	4%	46	8%	51	9%
BURGLARY	64	5%	49	4%	63	6%	48	4%
THEFT	423	7%	487	6%	597	6%	648	6%
M.V. THEFT	12	3%	18	5%	16	3%	28	6%
TOTALS	558	7%	592	5%	736	6%	789	6%

Source: Brownsville Police Department, Information collated & analyzed by CBIRD-UTB/TSC

The most alarming criminal statistic is the one that indicates that 91% or 29 of the reported 32 rapes in Brownsville occurred in the Buena Vida neighborhood during 2002.

The most alarming criminal statistic is the one that indicates that 91% or 29 of the reported 32 rapes in Brownsville [Table 37] occurred in the Buena Vida neighborhood during 2002. There were also 13 robberies, 51 aggravated assaults and 48 burglaries and 648 thefts. Also 28 motor vehicles were stolen.

Table 38 – 1999-2002 Reported Crime in Brownsville

OFFENSE	1999	2000	2001	2002
MURDER	4	5	7	1
RAPE	26	29	27	32
ROBBERY	166	181	180	181
AGG/ASSAULT	587	696	595	592
BURGLARY	1227	1227	1066	1207
THEFT	6249	8839	9571	10266
M.V. THEFT	351	388	460	480
TOTALS	8,610	11,365	11,906	12,759

Source: Brownsville Police Dept, Information collated & analyzed by CBIRD-UTB

Overall reported crime [Table 38] in Brownsville has demonstrated a steady increase since 1999 from a low of 8,610 incidents to a 2002 high of 12,759 incidents, a total that represents a 32% increase. The increase in crime in Buena Vida has been almost identical at a 30% rate during the same time frame.

Information was also obtained from the Cameron County Juvenile Department in San Benito and its Caseworker IV references show that there were 98 referrals involving 88 juveniles from Buena Vida from October 1, 2002 to March 6, 2003. The majority of the referrals were for misdemeanors ranging from theft to public lewdness and 17 of the referrals were for felonies ranging from burglary to sexual assaults. The data that is of concern is that which reflects referrals for sexual assaults in a community where the most rapes in Brownsville were committed. This is a smoke signal that should be seen and evaluated by all public and private agencies that attend to the social development of Brownsville.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS:

The most troubling aspect of this study is derived from the crime data that was collected by the researchers. There are some underlying issues that have resulted in this barrio having the highest crime rates in the city in proportion to its share of the population. These root causes are best addressed by criminologists or sociologists than by the present researchers. What the data show is that:

- The Buena Vida barrio has 2.1% of Brownsville’s population yet 6% of its crime rate. The ratio between the share of the population and the crime rate is disproportionate by any standard.

Overall reported crime in Brownsville has demonstrated a steady increase since 1999 from a low of 8,610 incidents to a 2002 high of 12,759 incidents a total that represents a 32% increase.

- The reported incidents of rapes were at 91% [29 of 32] of the total within the city in 2002. This rate represents a 6% increase from the 85% rate reported in 2001 for this same community.
- There are many felonious crimes in this barrio, especially in instances involving aggravated assaults, robbery, burglary, thefts and auto theft.
- The crime rate in Buena Vida is compatible with that of the city of Brownsville for the 1999 to 2002 timeframe. The crime rate in Brownsville went from a 1999 low of 8,610 to a 2002 high of 12,758 or a 32% gross increase which is not statistically different than the 30% rate in Buena Vida during the same time.
- There were 98 referrals to the Cameron County Juvenile Department for the six month period from October, 2002 to March, 2003. While the majority of referrals were misdemeanor in classification, seventeen were for felonies involving both burglaries and sexual assaults. That juveniles are being referred for sexual assaults from within a community that had the highest concentration of rapes in Brownsville should be of concern to all law enforcement agencies, public officials, school personnel, families and all residents of this region.

ASSETS AND ADVANTAGES

First and foremost, recognize the assets and competitive advantages in Buena Vida. Among those are:

- A central and compact location which is the gateway to Mexico.
- An accessible location that will be even more so when the widening of U.S. 77/83 is completed in four years.
- Its close proximity to a vibrant downtown should make it attractive to the development of businesses and services that cater to inward and outward traffic to Matamoros.
- Its location adjacent to the emerging Mitte Arts District and the soon to be constructed Linear Park will provide an opportunity to businesses that wish to target both clients of arts and recreation outlets such as the Historical Museum of Brownsville and the Gladys Porter Zoo.
- Its inventory of a large legal business community presents an opportunity for city planners to develop a “stakeholders plan” to actively engage them in the development of the community. This business cohort may be the source of a leadership cadre to mentor a community which needs to grow and nurture its own leadership base.
- The close proximity to a major higher education institution provides a ready market for retailers to develop a shopping area that caters to the student population of the university. Such student oriented shopping strips are common to the majority of communities that have one major post-secondary institution.
- Recognize the hub potential of this neighborhood and make it the center of a social services network that reaches out to all of Brownsville as do the spokes of a wheel.
- The elementary schools in this barrio are rated among the best in the state of Texas. The business community, that which is located within this area, should develop strong linkages and ties to the schools through Communities in Schools and Community Mentors Programs.

- A very solid infrastructure is evident in this neighborhood which reflects over \$2.1 million in investment from the City of Brownsville.
- There is an existing inventory of infill sites which consist of vacant parcels of land that have not been developed or where structures have been demolished. These sites are surrounded by an infrastructure: sewage, curbs, paved streets, that make up physical assets that do not have to be constructed by developers should they be encouraged to build residential properties in Buena Vida.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

It would be rather simple to dismiss the Buena Vida community as one without merit or worthy of further consideration by all elements of the private and public sectors of this region. The data does confirm that the City of Brownsville’s Department of Planning was not in error when it designated the majority of neighborhoods bordering downtown, including Buena Vida, as being in “distress” in its **1994 Strategic Plan** for its HUD Enterprise Community Application. The data also demonstrates that not much has transpired in the past nine years to transform or ameliorate the decay or regression of this community which has many assets that are all too easy to dismiss and ignore since the negative elements are all too easy to identify.

This environmental scan was guided by a model [**Figure A**] that CBIRD designed to guide its data collection and assessment. Of the twelve “continuous sustainability components” that were identified, only educational development emerged as a viable component.

Michael Porter’s (1995) observations about the inner city were used to set the direction for this study. His observations also serve to guide some of the corresponding challenges and opportunities that are framed by the research team for the considerations of the various government agencies, the not-for-profit community, both the public education [Pre-kindergarten to 12] and the post-secondary education institutions as well as policy planners and brokers. The challenge is for all of these institutions and individuals to develop a shared vision for a shared community that Buena Vida can be for the City of Brownsville.

The following represent those challenges and opportunities [action items] that the researchers propose as needing attention and action by all segments of the City of Brownsville to include the private sector, public education, higher education, and city government and its management cadre:

ACTION ITEM 1

The City of Brownsville’s Planning Department, the Brownsville Independent School District (BISD), and the University of Texas at Brownville and Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC) should take the lead in the development of an integrated resource development plan for all fund raising activities that are directed at improving the quality of life of this community. Essentially this means that all grants and fund

The data also demonstrates that not much has transpired in the past nine years to transform or ameliorate the decay or regression of this community which has many assets that are all too easy to dismiss and ignore since the negative elements are all too easy to identify.

solicitations for resources from the different government agencies, corporations and foundations should be coordinated through a single resource organization that is represented by professional staff of community stakeholders. There should be a strategic focus for resource development that is grounded in the shared vision of all stakeholders for the Buena Vida neighborhood.

ACTION ITEM 2

The City of Brownville should consider revisiting its Enterprise Community Application and its corresponding 1994 Strategic Plan to anchor a baseline reference to identify new benchmarks for community development. There is much substance in the 1994 Strategic Plan that was submitted to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development but little statistical reference or evidence to evaluate tangible and measurable outcomes.

ACTION ITEM 3

The City of Brownville needs to evaluate its current practices in building code enforcement to determine whether the code is being rigorously applied. There are too many properties in Buena Vida that are classified as either substandard or dilapidated and that should be either rehabilitated or razed to make space for new construction. The fact that over 80% of this barrio's properties are held without any debt and that over 70% are rented leads the researchers to ascertain that there is no vested interest or motivation for landlords to upgrade their properties.

ACTION ITEM 4

The City of Brownville along with the Community Development Corporation of Brownville needs to review and reconsider the development of housing within this barrio. There is sufficient vacant land, when combined with the razing of dilapidated and substandard properties, to accommodate the construction of single family residences. The data show over 70 empty lots and over 50 properties that have dilapidated structures on them. The corresponding retort to this proposal may be that these properties are not contiguous to each other and this may inhibit the undertaking of a major community housing initiative in this barrio. One only needs to look at the practice of Habitat for Humanity which has built many residences in neighborhoods similar to Buena Vida without restricting the construction to contiguous properties.

ACTION ITEM 5

UTB/TSC should consider using the Center for Civic Engagement as the conduit and catalyst for community development in this community.

This Center will be located within Buena Vida and its charge is already defined in terms of working to expand the quality of life of this barrio's residents.

ACTION ITEM 6

The BISD along with UTB/TSC should consider the development of "community learning centers" that make use of both the facilities and technology resources of the elementary schools to expand after hours and weekend educational and training services to both adults and children within Buena Vida. There are several existing best practices models in place in San Antonio and Houston that can be evaluated for replication.

ACTION ITEM 7

UTB/TSC should consider the expansion of workforce and economic development training activities within the Buena Vida to expand the employability capacity of its residents. Another consideration here is the development of a transportation plan in conjunction with the City of Brownsville by which this community's residents gain access to the training sites of UTB/TSC at both its West campus, ITEC and to Duffey Plaza.

ACTION ITEM 8

All identified stakeholders in the future of the Buena Vida barrio should work together to plan and develop a "one-stop social services center" which becomes the hub for the delivery of all social support services throughout the City of Brownsville. At present there is no evident integrated or coordinated action plan for social support services for this community that are linked to a local or regional support services network. There are best practices models in Houston and Dallas that can be reviewed and considered for replication.

ACTION ITEM 9

BISD, UTB/TSC and the City of Brownsville along with the United Way should consider appointing and charging a taskforce to evaluate the status quo of the need, availability and quality of family support services within the Buena Vida barrio. The data and feedback from this study

show that there is a scarcity of family and parenting programs to provide support for both children and women heads of households that are at risk due to spousal abuse.

ACTION ITEM 10

UTB/TSC's Center for Civic Engagement should develop a coordinated action plan with appropriate campus based academic programs and support services to expand and locate some of those functions and activities within its new headquarters at the Cueto Building on the corner of 13th street and Madison.

ACTION ITEM 11

UTB/TSC's Center for Civic Engagement should take the lead role in the identification of a corpus of both Buena Vida residents and non-residents to participate in an intensive leadership training series that results in a cadre of advocates and sponsors that have the skills to be the spokespersons for this community.

ACTION ITEM 12

The Center for Civic Engagement should work with the City of Brownsville and interested members of the business community in developing an outreach plan to involve Buena Vida based businesses to become active in the social, cultural and economic life of this community.

ACTION ITEM 13

The service delivery capacity of both the Good Neighbor Settlement House and the Boys and Girls Club should be supported and expanded with a higher allocation of CDBG funds from HUD's allocation to the City of Brownsville. These two anchor social services agencies are providing excellent services with the minimum of resources. That they exist and are functional is a testament to the perseverance and commitment of their boards and administrative and service delivery staffs.

ACTION ITEM 14

The root causes of the high crime rate in Buena Vida need a pro-active response from all segments of the City of Brownsville. The Mayor may consider the appointment of a Select Taskforce on Crime to address both crime in the Buena Vida community and the overall crime rate in Brownsville. There is a need to address the issues of isolation, illiteracy,

social stress, economic distress, and lack of quality home, recreational resources, familiar abuse and other such disenfranchisements that erupt into the type of crimes that have been and are present in this community. This situation is one that can create an imbalance in the overall quality of life of Brownsville if left unattended. Porter (1996) notes that, “both the reality and perception of crime represents profound impediments to urban economic development.”

ACTION ITEM 15

The City of Brownsville’s Police Department should consider updating its data base management information system so that timely statistics can be accessed that reflect current incidents by date, time, location, type of incidents and status of investigation or final action or resolution on an incident. The research team had to recreate, collate and format data from several sources from the police department for this report.

ACTION ITEM 16

The City of Brownsville and the developers of the Linear Park should consider the long term impact of this site and its various recreational and enterprise sites on the quality of life of the Buena Vida community. The focus here might be on how to engage the under and unemployed residents of Buena Vida in the workforce that will support the various social, cultural and related community activities that will be part and parcel of this site’s programs.

ACTION ITEM 17

The City of Brownsville is sorely lacking in its information technology systems to support its many organizations that serve all segments of the city and this situation needs immediate attention and action. There is an absence of an integrated and coordinated database management system within the various municipal agencies that serve both the Buena Vida community and the balance of the city of Brownsville.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

These action items are not inclusive nor can they be due to the fact that this study is one of the first, if not the first, that focuses on an inner city community such as Buena Vida within this region. There are many other questions and issues that were not considered at this time and which will require additional in-depth research and review by future studies. The following suggested subsequent studies and projects are proposed for the consideration of the academic and policy research community as well as the City of Brownsville's Planning Department:

- An in-depth study of the inward and outward migration patterns of Buena Vida's population to determine origin and points of resettlement after out-migrating from the community.
- A study conducted of the familial conditions of individuals that have been identified as participants in criminal activities within this barrio and throughout Brownsville. The focus should be on identifying some correlations between criminal activities and evident root causes brought on by economic conditions, displacement due to migration, and isolation due to dysfunctional family life, illiteracy or a lack of support services to provide an outlet for social stress.
- A longitudinal study conducted of the learning styles and effective teaching practices of the faculty of both Resaca and Putegnat Elementary schools to identify the baselines for their demonstrated success with at-risk students.
- A feasibility study to determine the need for social services to include family development, parenting education, daycare, after school tutoring services, workforce training, literacy and bilingual education for adults that increases their English language skills.
- A longitudinal study to evaluate the discrepancy or adherence to policies regarding the application of the city's building code to determine if there is a need to either revise the code or its actual use in the review of the substandard and dilapidated properties which abound in this barrio.
- A micro census of the business community undertaken to acquire current data that addresses the numbers of employees, economic impact of the businesses on both a singular and collective basis, the

client base, the capacity building and capital resources needs for these small businesses and what continuous sustainability assets or impediments are evident in the Buena Vida business community.

- A study to evaluate the net economic impact of the use of Community Development Block Grants funds by the city to affect inner city development, especially in neighborhoods that it has designated as being in distress.

SUMMARY

The data from this environmental scan reaffirms what has been known and said about the Buena Vida neighborhood by the City of Brownsville Planning Department and the Community Development Corporation of Brownsville. The main point of departure is that this study has made use of the most recent data from the US Census of 2000 and also from sources that were not available as soon as three years ago. Also, this study has collated data from many sources to paint a portrait of a community that has been both insolated and insulated from the mainstream of one of this state's fastest growing cities.

CBIRD believes that the data presents a true measure of the social indicators that this community fails to meet. It is truly a community at risk due to its overall low educational profile, its high crime rate, its low economic potential, the absence of adequate housing, and the absence of social support services to deflect the stress brought on by living in a less than desirable environment. The challenges that have been delineated also present opportunities for all concerned parties to respond affirmatively to a community that can be a nexus model for community revitalization. The key element will be how the community's stakeholders respond to the development of a coherent economic strategy to anchor this barrio's capacity as an essential element of a unique Texas city.

The overriding challenge to the City of Brownsville will be for all of its diverse constituencies to join together to develop a collaborative action plan that is grounded in a commitment to make Buena Vida a key part of this city's future. The challenge here is to develop a balanced response that includes an integration of economic, social support services and an expansion of training and placement opportunities of the residents to either enter the workforce or be retained in gainful employment. For this to happen will require leadership that is committed to a caveat that devalues any political currency that can be garnered by acting on this community's needs. Rather, there should be a collective self-interest to bring Buena Vida back into the fold as a vital member of this city's economic, social and cultural life. The focus must not be on the redistribution of favors or wealth but on the creation of a sustainable capacity for this community to also take an active role in the development of its own future.

The key element will be how the community's stakeholders respond to the development of a coherent economic strategy to anchor this barrio's capacity as an essential element of a unique Texas City.

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