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Historic Sylvan Beach Pavilion Will Soon Reopen Thanks In Part To San Jacinto College SBDC



Key players in the new venture stand inside the grand ballroom of the renovated Sylvan Beach Pavilion, including (from left) Richard Prets, director of San Jacinto College's Small Business Development Center; Armand, Raj, and Norma Shafaii. The Shafaii family's Party and Reception Center will serve as operator for private functions held at the pavilion. Photo credit: Rob Vanya, San Jacinto College marketing, public relations, and government affairs department.

PASADENA, Texas – Sylvan Beach Pavilion in La Porte, Texas, out of service since being severely damaged in Hurricane Ike, is being restored to mint condition, thanks to the help of the San Jacinto College Small Business Development Center (SBDC). The pavilion will soon reopen to the public to serve primarily as a venue for private events such as weddings, quinceañeras, reunions, banquets, parties, and proms.

Shafaii's Party and Reception Center (PRC) will serve as facility operator for private functions held at the Pavilion. PRC owner Raj Shafaii, who lives in Pasadena, says his company could not have fulfilled its plans of running an events venture at the pavilion without guidance and assistance provided by San Jacinto College's SBDC.

"We had a clear picture of the future we wanted to create for the Pavilion. However, we also recognized early on that we had limitations when it came to understanding and responding to the County's Request for Proposals for managing the Pavilion," Shafaii commented. "Our SBDC consultant, Richard Prets, is very knowledgeable and provided invaluable guidance through the entire application and negotiation process. Richard's guidance and advice made the whole process much easier."

A pavilion at Sylvan Beach Park, located on the shores of upper Galveston Bay in La Porte, Texas, has hosted many public and private events since first opening in the early 1900s. Renovated and new pavilions have been built on the site several times through the years due to damage from hurricanes. The structure currently on the site was built in 1956, and features a 10,000-square-foot glass-walled ballroom with a 3,600-square-foot circular hardwood dance floor. Other amenities include high-tech lighting, a large deck overlooking the water, an indoor/outdoor bar, a kitchen prep area, catering space, and a private dressing room. Located inside Sylvan Beach Park, the pavilion provides a panoramic view of upper Galveston Bay.

Harris County Pct. 2 Commissioner Jack Mormon, with support and efforts of Ted Powell and the Friends of Sylvan Beach, worked to restore the pavilion after it was destroyed by Hurricane Ike in 2008.

Prets, director of San Jacinto College's SBDC, helped to guide the Shafaii family through the mandatory and sometimes tedious proposal submission and negotiation process. "Mr. Prets helped us put together the proposal for submission to Harris County,"

Shafaii said. "Dealing with the county government was new territory for us, so we had to rely on Richard. Thanks to his help and expert guidance, we were awarded the Pavilion management contract by the County."

Prets says PRC will run a first-class operation as private event coordinators at the Pavilion. "Shafaii's company has been in business for 17 years and they operate five other private event venues, so they are competent and will be able to coordinate vendors and every aspect of just about any type of event," he commented.

Not only is Raj Shafaii a client of San Jacinto College's SBDC, he is also a graduate of the College. After earning an associate degree in general studies from San Jacinto College in 1978, he transferred to the University of Texas, where he earned a bachelor's degree in structural engineering.

Launching the new venture as private event coordinator at the pavilion is expected to create up to six new full-time and 40 part-time jobs for Shafaii's PRC, which began with a few family members and now employs approximately 100 people, including full-time and part-time staff, as well as event vendors. "The primary mission of the SBDC is to help businesses create new

jobs, so this is good news for Shafaii's company and it should also benefit the local economy," Prets remarked.

Prets also noted that more people might make use of services provided by the SBDC were it not for a general misconception that he frequently encounters. "Many people think the Small Business Development Center only offers services to very small businesses, such as those that employ 50 people or less," he commented. "But we can provide valuable services to businesses with up to 500 employees. I like to tell people that we can help small to mid-sized businesses. That's really a more accurate description of the SBDC."

The grand opening of the renovated Sylvan Beach Pavilion has been set for Oct. 25, with a ribbon cutting ceremony in the morning, followed by ballroom dancing in the evening. A live concert is tentatively scheduled for Oct. 26. For additional information about the pavilion, please visit www.mysylvanbeachpavilion.com. In addition to private functions, the pavilion will also host some public events. A community organization that will sponsor public dances at the Pavilion is in the formative stages.