

THE BRONCO

The Newsletter of Blackwell School Alliance

Winter 2017



Read Marfa comes to Blackwell for Christmas

READ MARFA is a wonderful program at the Marfa Elementary School where community volunteers come into the classroom to read stories to the children. Kathleen and David Walstrom on our Board participate, and David reads in Spanish to children whose first language is Spanish. The goal of the program is to instill a love of reading.



READ MARFA and the Blackwell School Alliance joined together to create a special Christmas Read Aloud at the Blackwell School on Saturday, December 17th. We welcomed children, families, and story-loving adults to enjoy readings of holiday stories in both Spanish and English, sweetened by hot chocolate and cookies. It was fun for everyone and we hope to do it again next year.



Draft Strategic Plan Ready for Review

The Blackwell School Alliance invites public comment on a draft Strategic Plan that envisions the next five to ten years of development at the Blackwell School. The story of the Blackwell School is complex, emotional, and often controversial—as befits a site of segregation. Therefore, we want to make sure that this plan properly represents the people most closely associated with the school.

The Blackwell School Alliance has been developing the Strategic Plan the past few months as an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come and where we want to go in preserving the Blackwell School. As an outgrowth of the Strategic Plan, the Alliance has identified many opportunities for volunteers—both one-time tasks and longer on-going projects.

The purposes of the Strategic Plan are to capture the ideas, hopes, and goals of what the Blackwell School can be; identify what is most significant about the Blackwell School; and to make a road map, with priorities, to achieve the goals. The Strategic Plan will provide language for use in grant applications and to

Blackwell Memories

We are actively involved now in interviewing former students for our oral history program.

What do YOU remember?

We want to hear your stories. Contact us using the information on the following page.

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Letter from Gretel Enck

Greetings from Marfa where today, as I write this, the temperature hovers around 42 degrees in the middle of the afternoon. It's Saturday so I'm at Blackwell today, grateful for the heater we installed last year with a grant from the Dougherty Foundation.

Today I'm working on the grant writing plan for 2017. Just a week ago we submitted a grant application to the Texas Historical Commission. And now I'm making the list of grants to apply for in the coming months: for building funds, research grants, money to cover operational expenses, and more.

You can read all about our plans and goals in the draft strategic plan. Yes, it's ambitious. That's what you should expect from those of us on the Board. We may not get there quickly, but we want

Strategic Plan, continued...

communicate priorities and activity sequences to former students and community stakeholders.

The priorities for 2017 are the continued preservation and restoration of the historic 1880s adobe schoolhouse, the expansion of the oral history program, and seeking listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Blackwell School Alliance recently submitted a grant application to the Texas Historical Commission to undergo a Historic Structures Report, the precursor to obtaining construction grants from the THC. In the past six months, the Alliance has entered into a partnership with the University of Texas El Paso for assistance with its oral history program with the goal of interviewing former students living in the El Paso area. National Register listing will afford more opportunities for grant funding and recognition.

to draw the map so that we know where we want to go.

The more I learn about everything that the Blackwell School Alliance has done before I got involved, and all the hard work by people before me, the more committed I am to keeping us going. And more than that, I'm committed to seeing this place thrive. To do that, we will need everyone's help. Please take a look at the plan and give us your thoughts. And don't forget—we also want your stories. The oral history program is up and running and looking for you.

It's an exciting time to be involved at the Blackwell School. Stop in and see us any Saturday you're in town.

Cheers, Gretel

With all of the activities and aspirations contained in the Strategic Plan, the Blackwell School Alliance needs the help of volunteers. Long term projects include database development for digital collections, interviewing and cataloging of oral histories, and grant writing. Short term projects include event assistance, social media planning, and grounds keeping.

Both the Strategic Plan and a list of current volunteer needs can be found on the Blackwell School website at www.blackwellschool.org. The Blackwell School Alliance invites comments on the plan until March 15, 2017.

For more information and to obtain a paper copy of the plan, please call Gretel Enck at 432.295.3359 or visit the Blackwell School on Saturdays between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Remembering Good Friends

Since last we wrote, the Blackwell School family has suffered losses.

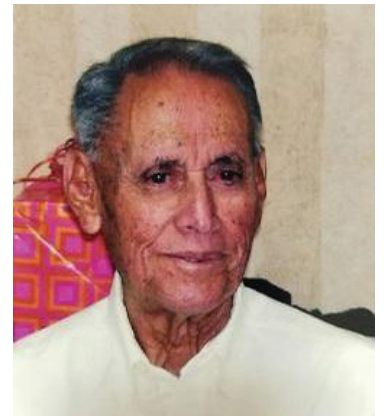
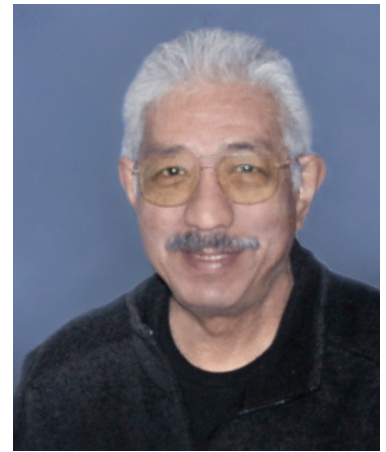
Richard R. Williams passed away in August at the age of 71 after a brief illness. Richard served the Blackwell School Alliance as our historian, archivist, board member, and friend. He worked tirelessly and cheerful to collect photographs, artifacts, and stories. He was also on the board of the Marfa and Presidio County Museum and was helpful in many ways in our community.

He is survived by his wife, Celia V. “Sally” Williams; a brother, Daniel R. Williams of Stockton, California; sisters, Aida W. Tarin and Jessi W. Silva, both of Marfa; his faithful dog Coco; and numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, and countless friends. His generous spirit and wise counsel will live on in the collection he built and the lives he touched.

In December we learned of the passing of Hector Valdes, 86, a former teacher and coach at the Blackwell School. His family and friends knew him as Tito, yet many former Blackwell students refer to him fondly as Coach. He began teaching at the Blackwell School in 1953.

He eventually returned to his hometown of Del Rio and served as a teacher, administrator, and a small business operator for the duration of his career. Coach Valdes remained an avid supporter of the Blackwell School and the Blackwell School Alliance. He is survived by his wife, Diana R. Valdes, and many children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and numerous nieces and nephews.

The Blackwell School Alliance extends our sincere condolences to the families of these fine men, and our gratitude for their faithful service to the Blackwell School.



Upper photo: Richard Williams
Lower photo: Hector Valdes

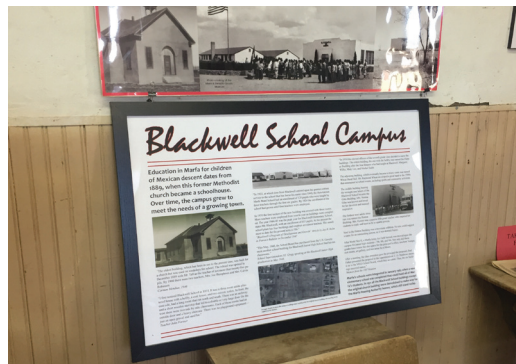
Helping our Visitors Make a Connection

It used to be that a visitor to the Blackwell School would call one of the phone numbers on the sign out front and get a personal tour from a former student. Joe Cabezuella or Richard Williams would walk a visitor—often here for the first time—through the exhibits and tell stories to educate about the experience of the Blackwell School. Or maybe the visitor was a former student who knew the stories but wanted to see what might be new at the school.

Today the school is open to the public every Saturday, but the volunteer staffing the school is not a former student. Without a lot of help, a first-time visitor doesn't understand the significance of the photos and memorabilia that they see.

So we are creating a handful of exhibit posters that use pieces of oral history interviews and excerpts of written memoirs to educate about facets of Blackwell School history. We hope that this helps visitors make a connection with this important piece of Marfa history.

Next time you visit the Blackwell School, let us know what you think.




Because of the cost of producing and mailing this newsletter, future issues will only be mailed to dues-paying members.

You can always read our newsletters on our website.

Better yet, pay your annual dues every June!

Blackwell School Alliance
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Welcome to the Blackwell School



Education in Marfa for children of Mexican descent dates from 1889, when this former Methodist church became a schoolhouse.

Mexican American students in Texas were not separated from their Anglo counterparts by state law like African American students were. Instead, Texas school districts established separate elementary schools for Mexican American children through the practice of *de facto* segregation.

In Marfa, where the majority of the population was Hispanic, that school was the Blackwell School. Blackwell closed in 1965 when a new elementary school opened and Marfa's schools achieved integration.

In 2007 a group of former students got together to save their original elementary school building that was threatened with demolition.

Today the Blackwell School Alliance works to preserve and restore the historic school building; interpret and commemorate the era of segregated Hispanic education; and serve the Marfa, Texas, community culturally, historically, and educationally for the benefit of all Marfa residents and visitors, now and into the future.

What do you think?

What does the Blackwell School mean to you?

The story of the Blackwell School is not a single story but a mosaic of the individual experiences of students, teachers, families, and neighbors.

In preserving this special place, it is critical that we honor individual experiences. Some former students remember wonderful times at Blackwell. Others tell stories of humiliation and discrimination at Blackwell and in the community of Marfa. And feelings change: some remember the way they felt in school as a result of an event, but express a different understanding in retrospect.

This is the new Welcome poster that visitors see when entering the Blackwell School. Come see what else is new the next time you are in Marfa. The school is open every Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.