



Texas Supreme Court Justice Eva Guzman and students from Texas A&M International University at the Attorneys Without Borders reception.

ATTORNEYS WITHOUT BORDERS

Despite Laredo's distance from its closest Texas law school — St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio about 156 miles away — it has always been a goal of **Victor Villarreal's** to bring legal educational opportunities to his hometown. Born and raised in Laredo, Villarreal was not on track to become a lawyer — he was a political science major with a minor in sociology. It wasn't until he was 22 years old and completing an internship at the National Science Foundation that Villarreal decided to go into the field of law. "That summer I realized that lawyers possess critical problem-solving skills and extra responsibilities to society," he says.

Now a partner in Villarreal & Romero, P.L.L.C. and a director on the board of the Texas Young Lawyers Association, he wanted to share with those in Laredo and its surrounding areas a glimpse into his profession. He was inspired by State Bar statistics that revealed that Laredo has less private practitioners, per capita, than almost all areas in the state.

With the help of TYLA Director **Priscilla Camacho** and the TYLA Diversity Committee, Villarreal brought the Supreme Court of Texas to Laredo to hear oral arguments in February — a first for the border city. The event, *Attorneys Without Borders*, included a reception where Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) students had the opportunity to meet with the justices. In addition, both the City of Laredo and Webb County proclaimed Feb. 29, 2012, Attorneys Without Borders Day in Laredo.

The following morning, more than 200 students, facul-

ty members, and attorneys attended the public session of the Supreme Court, where two attorneys presented their cases to the court. Before the session, TAMIU President Ray M. Keck III called it a gift to host the Texas Supreme Court and to see how the judicial process works. After the oral arguments, the justices participated in a question-and-answer session with students, discussing the judicial process, what it takes to become a Supreme Court justice, and running an election campaign.

Villarreal spoke to the students in the audience after the session. "We hope that what you have seen today has spurred your interest in the practice of law. We encourage you to apply to law school after you graduate from this university and want you to know that there is nothing impeding you from applying to law school."

Selene Cuevas, a TAMIU student, said the session was so much more than simply seeing the state's highest court in action. "This is a really significant event because it helps people gain a better understanding of how courts work. More than that, there are people in this audience who have now been exposed to the field of law as a career option."

Villarreal agrees. "One student asked whether there had ever been a Texas Supreme Court justice with an Asian heritage," he says. "I suspect that the student who asked that question will work very hard to become the first Texas Supreme Court justice with an Asian heritage. The visit likely fueled the student's goals — that is what makes the Court's visit priceless." — *P.G.*



Attorneys Spell V-i-c-t-o-r-y for Literacy Center

Can you spell “zaibatsu”? It might help to hear it in a sentence: The winners of the 20th annual Great Grown-Up Spelling Bee — a team from Susman Godfrey, L.L.P. in Houston — clinched their title with the word “zaibatsu.”

The spelling bee, which took place at the Hilton Americas in Houston on Jan. 27, benefited the Houston Center for Literacy. Guests enjoyed a silent auction and sit-down dinner while spelling bee contestants were asked to spell words like zaibatsu (a Japanese business conglomerate, by the way). The event was chaired by Sarah and Bradley Bracewell, who are also directors of the Houston Center for Literacy’s Board.

Houston Center for Literacy’s Great Grown-Up Spelling Bee raises community awareness and program support for adult literacy efforts across Houston. “This festive event revolves around a team spelling competition, in which teams of three from various organizations compete against each other, until one becomes v-i-c-t-o-r-i-o-u-s,” Annie Criner, the Center’s Director of Development, said.

Sixteen teams competed and raised a record \$130,000 for the organization. “Houston Center for Literacy, formerly Houston READ Commission, is working to build a literate, prepared workforce by supporting literacy agencies and programs, engaging the entire community to join us in solving this staggering illiteracy problem, and connecting learners with the education they need to be prepared for the future,” Criner said.

The winning team consisted of Houston attorneys **Rick Hess, Matt Behncke, and Rob Safi.** — *E.C.*



Right: The winners of the 20th annual Great Grown-Up Spelling Bee, from left, Rick Hess, Matt Behncke, and Rob Safi, all of Susman Godfrey, L.L.P.

TEXAS PEOPLE



Paul Dickerson
Partner, Haynes and Boone,
L.L.P., Houston

Reappointed to two-year term on the Texas Bioenergy Policy Council, an advisory group that provides leaders in Austin with information about energy alternatives.



Texas Sen. **Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa**
Hinojosa Law Firm, P.C., McAllen

Named Border Texan of the Year by the City of Hidalgo’s BorderFest for his more than 20 years of service in the Texas Legislature and his efforts to better the region.



Mary-Olga Lovett
Co-managing shareholder,
Greenberg Traurig, L.L.P., Houston

Honored as a 2012 Premier Woman in the Law by the Association of Women Attorneys. The award honors women attorneys who have achieved the rank of managing partner.



Matt Powell
District Attorney, Lubbock County
Criminal District Attorney’s Office

Received the 2011 Harold Cottle Justice Award from the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault for his work in supporting victims, rape crisis programs, and survivors of rape.