

## The Oyster Bar: A Downtown Tradition for 75 Years

By Alfonso Lopez, BHA Staff



*Justo Barrientes Sr.*

When you learn about the history of food and restaurants in Brownsville, Texas, you will find amazing marinades, historic cooking methods, and restaurants that are over 100 years old. In subsequent newsletter articles we will explore the history of food and established restaurants in South Texas. The Oyster Bar, located at 1057 E. Levee Street, is one of the oldest restaurants in Brownsville. The Oyster Bar opened on November 14, 1950. Justo Barrientes, Sr. is the man who took the risk in opening this establishment by betting on a simple combination: oysters and beer. As their 75th anniversary approaches, the managers and great grandsons of Mr. Barrientes (Justin and Brandon White) stated “We are planning a very special event for this year being that this will be the restaurants’ 75th year anniversary! Big updates to come, but as of now we can just tell you we are planning a big surprise and a chance to show appreciation to our customers.”

Since its opening, the Oyster Bar prides itself on its family, tradition, and delicious food. Justo Barrientes, Jr., took over management from his father around

*Original Oyster Bar menu from 1950. >*



*Inside of the downtown Brownsville Oyster Bar location.*

1970 and opened other locations on South Padre Island, Harlingen, McAllen, and Weslaco. According to his grandsons, Justin and Brandon White, he had a work ethic that was second to none. Justin and Brandon talked about how their grandfather would “visit every restaurant, ice down the food, and open each location every day.” It was this work ethic that helped his grandsons survive one of the hardest times in our nation’s history: the COVID-19 Pandemic. During the pandemic, many restaurants and businesses shut their doors for good. Yet, the Oyster Bar was not one of these businesses. Justin and Brandon, along with a small team, modified operations and offered curb side orders during this challenging time. Justin and Brandon both

recognize and appreciate the loyal customers who kept them in business and still keep the Oyster Bar alive in Brownsville.

It’s difficult to believe that a “variety plate” which included two oysters, two clams, two shrimp, other seafood and charro beans was only \$1.25. Don’t we wish prices existed like that today? Yet, even with prices going up, many loyal and established customers go to the Oyster Bar for the fried shrimp. The fried shrimp are so good it is rumored that Bill Springsteen and Jimmy Buffet would send their workers to pick up their oyster and shrimp dishes from this location when they were in the area. Another fun celebrity fact is that Mel Gibson filmed a scene from “Get the Gringo” in this location. This is evident when you walk in their main location on Levee Street. The midcentury modern setting is a simple and classy setup where every customer is surrounded by black and white photos of the Barrientes family, friends, and their descendants. The restaurant’s consistency, ambiance, and great food is what has kept them thriving for 75 years.



*Justo Barrientes Sr. and his wife Consuelo Barrientes in front of the original restaurant located in downtown Brownsville.*



## Simon Celaya Railroad Gallery Update: Brownsville On the Move

Last year, the Brownsville Historical Association hosted an open house event to announce its ongoing major renovation and reinterpretation initiative, Brownsville on the Move. This transformative project was made possible through a generous grant of \$420,929.09 awarded by the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation. With this funding, the BHA consulted with MuseWork to lead the conceptual design, content development, and fabrication components of the project. Brownsville on the Move encompasses a comprehensive reinterpretation of the Southern Pacific Depot and the auxiliary buildings at the Historic Brownsville Museum. The first phase centers on the Simon Celaya Railroad Gallery, which began in winter 2024 and is projected for completion by fall 2025. The reimagined exhibits will feature interactive elements, audiovisual presentations, and bilingual text panels to provide an engaging and accessible experience for diverse audiences. In addition to exhibit enhancements, significant



Movers temporarily relocating artifacts for renovation work.



building improvements have been undertaken, including roof and window replacements, landscaping, and exterior painting.

We invite you to stay informed and follow our progress by visiting our social media platforms for regular updates on this exciting project.

< Building lettering replacement.



Window replacement for Simon Celaya Railroad Gallery.



Updating light fixtures for the exterior.

# Welcome!

### NEW BHA MEMBERS

Mr. & Mrs. John Chosy  
Wayne Powell

Stephen R. Shull  
Zoraya Salinas

..... Thanks for your membership renewal! .....

Dora & Alfredo Bermudez

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David Combe

Paula Hecht

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# Historical Happenings Historical Happenings Historical Happenings

**Style in Motion: Fashion Show Fundraiser**



**Art Without Limits: A Celebration of All Abilities**



**BISD Elementary Art Contest Exhibit**



**Historical Happy Hour: Celebrating Preservation Month**



**Memorial Day Flags at the Old City Cemetery**



**Nailed it! A Journey through Preservation: Saint Charles Street District**





FASHION April 4th 7PM

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