

# PRIMA PRESS

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR OUR MEMBERS

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Texas Chapter Public Risk Management Association

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## Howdy Texas PRIMA Family!

What an incredible experience we had at the 35th Annual Texas PRIMA Conference and Expo in San Antonio! With a record-breaking 830 attendees, including 338 first-time attendees, it was truly an event to remember. I hope each of you took full advantage of the educational sessions and networking opportunities.

Our keynote speakers were amazing! Kevin Brown, with his inspiring *Hero Effect* message, reminded us that leadership starts with mastering ourselves and cultivating the daily habits that help us become world-class leaders, mentors, and coaches. Chris Field's *Disrupting for Good* was equally impactful, with a powerful call to action: anyone, anywhere, can choose to disrupt for good. This year's educational sessions were a highlight, with a stellar lineup of speakers and panels offering insights on industry best-practices, market updates, and success stories. I'm also thrilled we were able to offer TDI adjuster/agent continuing education credits, along with SHRM, HRCI, and Certified Case Manager credits, providing added value for our certified professionals.

A huge thank you goes to our loyal sponsors and exhibitors. The exhibit hall was a sellout with 94 vendors, and we expanded our number of Titanium sponsors this year. Special thanks to Alliant, Marsh McLennan Agency, McGriff, Sedgwick, and TRISTAR for their support at the top sponsorship Titanium level. I hope everyone enjoyed exploring the variety of products and services on display.

Congratulations to our award winners, especially Risk Professional of the Year, Veronica Guevara, Risk Management and Compliance Director for Bexar County. A special thank you to McGriff for sponsoring our Awards Luncheon. A round of applause also goes to Rising Star Shawna Nevins, Risk Management and Insurance Analyst for the Lewisville Independent School District, and to New Braunfels Utilities, which received the Program Achievement Award for their outstanding Enterprise Risk Management Program.

Looking back on the year, I'm proud of the many milestones Texas PRIMA has achieved, though we've also faced some challenges. In 2017, the Board signed a contract with La Cantera for our 2020 conference, but as we all know, the pandemic had other plans. We are incredibly grateful for La Cantera's flexibility in rescheduling, and I'm thrilled that we've outgrown venues like La Cantera. In 2017, we had 518 attendees, but this year we saw over 800 registrations. This growth is a testament to the progress our association has made. Additionally, we faced some logistical hurdles in 2024, as hotel management informed us of renovations to their sleeping rooms during our conference. Thankfully, La Cantera secured alternative accommodations. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to thank you for your patience and understanding, and for trusting us to create a valuable conference experience despite the challenges.

This conference wouldn't have been possible without the dedication and hard work of our Board of Directors and their committees. Thank you to our Social Media Committee, which has helped us grow to over 2,100 LinkedIn followers. The Education Committee delivered great webinars and coffee talks. We've also seen growth in our membership. I encourage all of you to share the benefits of Texas PRIMA with your colleagues, especially those who may not yet be taking full advantage of everything our association offers. I also encourage you to look for opportunities to serve on one of Texas PRIMA's committees—these groups are vital to the success of our chapter.

A special thanks to our newly elected board members, Travis Yarborough from Tarrant County and Cindy Gutierrez from the City of Edinburg. We also appreciate Belinda Raindl from La Vernia ISD for stepping up to fill a vacant Director role. I'm excited to see what their leadership will bring to Texas PRIMA in the years ahead. I'd also like to express my deepest gratitude to our outgoing board members—Robert Warren for his service and leadership as he assumes his new role on the National PRIMA Board, as well as Kaltrina Minnick and Melissa Ledesma for their invaluable contributions to our organization. We wish them all the best!

Finally, thank you, Texas PRIMA, for the honor and privilege of serving as your 2024 President. It's been an incredible year, and I'm excited for what's ahead for our organization and our members. We look forward to seeing you all next year in Galveston!

Sincerely,  
Norma Martinez  
2024 Texas PRIMA President

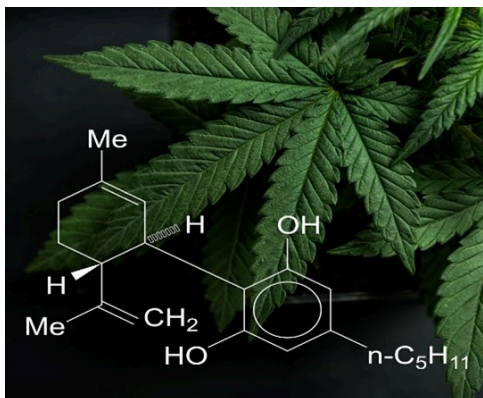
 [View 2024 conference photos!](#)



## Planning for the Inevitable Major Business Disruption

Business disruption has been identified as a rapidly evolving risk for 2025 that could significantly impact an organization's operations. It may result in substantial financial losses and is not yet fully understood or widely recognized, as it is often related to new technologies, climate change, geopolitical instability, or complex supply chain challenges. [Click here](#) to learn more about business continuity planning to protect your organization.

*Source: Alex Zank, Brew Brand 2024*



## Update on the DEA's Efforts to Reschedule Cannabis: What You Need to Know

In October 2022, President Biden directed the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to review marijuana's classification. Earlier this year, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) began efforts to reschedule cannabis from Schedule I to Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) after receiving an opinion from the DHHS. [Click here](#) to learn more about the current status of rescheduling and the next steps.

*Source: Alex Malyshev and Sarah Ganley, Reuters Inc.*



**Risk Professional of the Year:  
Veronica Guevara  
Risk Management and Compliance Director  
Bexar County**

Veronica's main responsibilities include overseeing all liability, litigation, and workers' compensation claims. She spearheaded a change in the department to implement a 504 Workers' Compensation program, focusing on addressing employee injuries more quickly and efficiently. This transition has resulted in cost savings and a decline in claims. Veronica also sits on a law enforcement crash review board for motor vehicle accidents, with the goal of improving driving habits and reducing motor vehicle accidents.



**Rising Star  
Shawna Nevins  
Risk Management and Insurance Analyst  
Lewisville Independent School District**

Shawna's major responsibilities include ensuring that the district has adequate external insurance protections, identifying new areas of risk as they arise, and managing the procurement and administration of all insurance professional service contracts as well as contract consultants. Shawna developed firm vendor insurance requirements for LISD to ensure that every vendor doing business with the district has adequate coverage. She trains staff members and other individuals on insurance-related issues. Shawna serves on the Texas PRIMA Member Services Committee and is an active member of the Texas Association of School Business Officials. She is a certified School Risk Manager, Texas School Business Specialist, and Texas School Business Official. Additionally, she serves as a peer mentor for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors.



**Program Achievement Award  
New Braunfels Utilities  
Enterprise Risk Management Program**

The New Braunfels Utilities (NBU) implemented an Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) Program that has achieved remarkable success. In 2020 and 2021, NBU kicked off the first twenty-five ERM workshops. By 2022, NBU began building their ERM system within Smartsheet. Through these efforts, they documented over 400 company risks.

The NBU Risk Team collaborated closely with the Technology Department to develop several custom workflows, including the ERM Risk Intake workflow, which allows new risks to be submitted through an intake form. Using this data, NBU built a powerful ERM Risk Dashboard.

After five years of development, NBU successfully launched its ERM Program. Now, with only one year of full operation, they have mitigated numerous risk factors and reduced the level and frequency of many risks. This shift is a direct result of the department's proactive oversight, not only in identifying company risks but also in finding ways to lessen their impact when they occur. Look for our annual "Award Winning Programs" Coffee Talk in 2025 to learn how your organization can replicate this program.



## Education Update

Through our virtual offerings throughout the year across 15 sessions, the Education Committee has provided 13 hours of SHRM and HRCI continuing education credit and 7 hours of TDI credit. The Education Committee also put on our second annual Virtual Summit in May, a two-day conference offering a keynote and four educational sessions. The summit provided 4.5 hours of SHRM and HRCI continuing education credit and 4 hours of TDI credit.

### Upcoming Sessions

December 3rd - [Anatomy of a Lawsuit](#)

December 17th - [Coffee Talk: Holiday Hangout](#)

January 15th - [Mind your Comings and Goings: Application of the Ingress and Egress Doctrine](#)

February 19th - [Defending Your Workplace Culture: Tackling the 4 Biggest Threats to Your Team Engagement and Cohesion](#)

March 25th - [What You Need to Know about Workers' Compensation Claims in 2025](#)

Don't forget that recordings of our webinars are in your [Community](#) under the Resources header.

*Melissa Ledesma, Education Chair*



## Conference Scholarship Recipients

This year, scholarships were awarded to 17 individuals representing school districts, counties, cities, health institutions, and river authorities across the state of Texas, as well as two students from St. Mary's University.

"Attending the Texas PRIMA Conference as a scholarship recipient was an incredible experience. It not only expanded my knowledge of risk management, but also connected me with inspiring professionals who are passionate about making a difference. The sessions were insightful, and the networking opportunities have been invaluable for my growth in this field. I'm so grateful for the scholarship that made this opportunity possible—it's truly been a game-changer for me as I navigate my career in risk management." Kristan Cazares, Galveston County

"Thank you to Texas PRIMA and all the sponsors who helped make the scholarship program possible! The conference in San Antonio was an amazing opportunity to network with other risk professionals from surrounding entities. As someone new to this field, the educational sessions provided at the conference were extremely helpful. This was a phenomenal opportunity, and I hope to attend every year!" Candace Mora, City of San Marcos







The majority of this year's recipients are new to the risk management field and to Texas PRIMA, so please take time to reach out to them in the Texas PRIMA Community and welcome them!

The scholarship program would not be possible without our generous scholarship sponsors. On behalf of the board and the 2024 scholarship recipients, I would like to thank each of you for your support of this program. This year's annual conference scholarship sponsors were McGriff, TriStar, Alliant, Injury Management Organization (IMO), Sedgwick, Delta Dental, Commercial Risk Services, Claims Administrative Services (CAS), Athens, and Trinity Review Services.

*Kaltrina Minick, Scholarship Committee Chair*



## Introducing the 2025 Texas PRIMA Board of Directors

The Nominations and Election Committee Chair is pleased to announce the addition of two new Directors-at-Large to the 2025 Board of Directors for the Texas PRIMA Chapter. Five nominations were submitted, and elections were conducted in October. The newly elected board members were announced during the Membership Meeting at our 2024 Annual Conference. The new board term begins on January 1, 2025. Congratulations to the new Directors-at-Large:

### **Cindy Gutierrez, City of Edinburg**



Cindy is the Risk Manager for the City of Edinburg. She began her risk management career in 2019 but has worked in the public sector since 2014 in various capacities. Cindy currently oversees workers' compensation and loss prevention activities, in addition to employee training and development.

### **Travis Yarbrough, Tarrant County**



Travis serves as the Assistant Director of Risk Management for Tarrant County. He has over 10 years of experience in public sector risk management. Travis manages the County's self-insurance program, which includes numerous lines of coverage and staff adjusters. Additionally, he administers the budget for prior liabilities and the group insurance fund.



## Belinda Raindl, La Vernia ISD

After a vacancy on the board, Belinda Raindl has been appointed by the Board of Directors to serve an additional year to fill the position. A proud Baylor Bear, Belinda—known as Belle to many—holds a bachelor's degree from Baylor University. She currently serves as the Chief Financial Officer for La Vernia Independent School District, whose mascot is also a Bear—Sic 'em!

With a proven track record of integrating financial oversight with risk mitigation strategies, Belle plays a critical role in guiding the district through challenging budget years and structuring insurance programs that result in cost savings, enhanced safety, and organizational resilience. She provides regular updates to the Board of Trustees on financial, legislative, insurance, and operational matters, ensuring they are well-informed for strategic decision-making.



## National PRIMA Update

Adam Maxwell, National PRIMA President, attended the 2024 Texas PRIMA Conference held in San Antonio from November 10–13. Adam serves as the Director of Administrative Services for the City of Westerville, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus, where he oversees risk and safety, procurement and contracting, and buildings and grounds operations for the organization.

PRIMA has nearly 30 state and local chapters across the country. Over the past several months, Adam has visited several chapters, including Virginia PRIMA, Ohio PRIMA, Tennessee PRIMA, and most recently, Texas, where he has been encouraging stronger connections between National PRIMA and its chapters. In addition, he has represented PRIMA at other professional associations and conferences, including the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in September and the PRIMA Institute (PI) in Scottsdale, Arizona, in October.

PRIMA offers several committees that provide excellent opportunities for members to give back to the risk management profession. These include the Chapter Relations and Membership Committee, the Education Committee, and the Leadership Development Committee, which meets annually in Alexandria, Virginia, and is responsible for selecting National Board Members. Additionally, PRIMA provides several scholarship opportunities and recognizes risk professionals with various awards. Volunteers are always needed to serve on scholarship and award selection committees.

In addition to the annual conference, PRIMA holds several professional development and networking events throughout the year. The PRIMA Institute is held annually in late October, with next year's event scheduled in Columbus, Ohio from October 20–24. The inaugural PRIMA Leadership Academy was launched in 2024, receiving positive feedback. Plans are in place to make this leadership development program an annual event, with the 2025 edition scheduled for Alexandria, Virginia from March 4–5. Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) training is also offered virtually throughout the year.

PRIMA continues its NextGen initiative to encourage young professionals to start careers in public risk and safety management. A mentor-mentee program pairs seasoned professionals with those newer to the profession, and virtual touch-points are held throughout the year. Several NextGen scholarships are offered to attend the annual

conference, where recipients are arranged in cohorts. Networking opportunities are facilitated to help young professionals connect with veteran members.

Adam thoroughly enjoyed his visit, noting the size and sophistication of the event and remarking that it's true, "things are bigger in Texas, including Texas PRIMA." He also praised the strong programming and networking opportunities and expressed gratitude to the board and general membership for their warm welcome and hospitality.

*Robert Warren - Past President, National PRIMA Board Member*



**October: Derek Dominguez, Director of Benefits & Risk Management**

Derek began as a Licensed All-Lines P&C Adjuster in 2010. In 2019 he began his risk management career with Midland ISD in a newly created role. He enjoys the investigative aspects of the risk role that allows him to identify preventative measures to mitigate risks in the district. In 2021, Midland ISD was awarded the TASB Risk Management Fund Award of Excellence for implementing a departmental app to improve communication with their employees. Derek states that Texas PRIMA has been invaluable for networking with peers and vendors, by helping them streamline processes within their school district. The insights gained from other risk management professionals have been very beneficial.



**November: Lan Le, Human Resources Generalist, City of Boerne**

Lan Le began her risk management career twelve years ago at Walgreens and today she is an HR Generalist at the City of Boerne working towards professional certifications in risk management. Lan most appreciates the opportunity to safeguard her organization and its employees by recognizing and tackling risks. Lan previously received a Texas PRIMA scholarship and shares that Texas PRIMA has significantly enhanced her career by providing valuable educational materials, support, and expertise. Lan's role in risk management is impacted by something Gary Cohn said: "If you don't invest in risk management, it doesn't matter what business you're in, it is a risky business."



**December: Raul Cantu, Risk Manager, Weslaco ISD**

Raul began his career in Risk Management in 2023, serving as an Employee Benefits and Risk Manager after dedicating 29 years to public education at Weslaco ISD. During his tenure, he took on multiple roles, including teacher, counselor, and assistant principal. Raul finds great fulfillment in helping others during times of need, collaborating with his exceptional team, and witnessing how support services positively impact the education of students in the ISD community. As Raul explains, "By identifying the exposures faced, it allows us to mitigate those risks; therefore, keeping uninterrupted student learning a priority." Raul shares that Texas PRIMA conferences were the best, most informative and educational conferences he attended in his 30-year career. Guided by the wisdom of his late father, Raul values integrity deeply, believing it transcends circumstances and defines one's essence and being.





## Tribute to Outgoing President, Norma Martinez

Norma Martinez served as Texas PRIMA President in 2019, and she loved the association so much that she graciously agreed to return to fill a vacant position, resulting in her serving as Texas PRIMA President again in 2024! This year presented a number of challenges, and Norma met every one of them head-on and with grace, thereby leading us to a record-setting conference of 830 attendees!

The conference theme of *Wranglin' the Wild West* was most fitting, and Norma spent a little bit of time throughout the year wrangling her emotions! Despite the challenges that came, Norma stood tall and strong and worked tirelessly, at times into the morning hours, ensuring that items were completed.

Norma is welcoming, fun-loving, and persistent. She wants everyone to be a part of Texas PRIMA, and she is willing to walk alongside anyone who needs assistance. Norma has reached out to numerous Texas PRIMA members over the years and encouraged them to be more involved and to join the board. She is a firm believer that everyone has something to offer, and she has done a great job giving others the opportunity to contribute.

On behalf of Texas PRIMA and its Board of Directors, a heart-felt thank you to Norma for leading us this record-setting year!

*Jamee Higgins, CRM, 2024 President-Elect*



## Letter From the Editor

Welcome to our December 2024 Texas PRIMA Press newsletter, we hope the content has been enjoyable! Let's embrace the spirit of the season and draw close to those that mean the most to you. On behalf of the Texas PRIMA Board, we wish our Texas PRIMA family a wonderful holiday season, we thank you for all your support! I am grateful to have been able to serve as this year's PRIMA Press newsletter editor, I am blessed. As always, please feel free to share your ideas for future articles, promotions, and the successes you are realizing in your organizations and programs with [info@texasprima.org](mailto:info@texasprima.org).

*Yolanda "Yoli" Perez, MS, C-DER, Newsletter Committee Chair*

## Sponsor Highlight



McGriff's Public Entity group provides risk management solutions to tax-supported institutions, city and state governments, educational and transportation districts, and nonprofit agencies. We understand the exposures faced by the public sector as well as the usual constraints related to budgets and staffing. The McGriff team has the global contacts and resources to tailor the right fit for you. We have experienced actuaries and safety and claims consultants on staff.





Founded in 1991, Injury Management Organization, Inc. (IMO) is a full managed care company. IMO serves public and private employers, nonsubscribers, insurance carriers and third party administrators. IMO conducts all managed care services and organically developed the IMO Med-Select Network, a top network performer with high quality and premier customer service delivery.

 [View IMO's conference photo booth pics!](#)



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