



For Immediate Release

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Harlingen Mourns Passing of Airline Pioneer That Helped Put VIA on the Map

Harlingen, Texas– The City of Harlingen was saddened to learn of the passing of Southwest Airlines Founder and Chairman Emeritus Herbert D. Kelleher. The 87 year old passed away on Thursday, January 3, 2019.

Mayor Chris Boswell credits Kelleher’s vision for helping Valley International Airport become the largest and most used airport in the Rio Grande Valley. With more than 700,000 passengers on a yearly basis, almost half use Southwest Airlines. VIA numbers for 2018 show that 321,945 people chose Southwest Airlines to travel to and from Harlingen.

Southwest Airlines began serving Harlingen in 1975. It was the fourth new destination served by Southwest following its initiation of service in 1971 from Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio as a new start up air carrier. At the time, Southwest faced competition from a few Texas based airlines like Braniff International, Continental, and Texas International. However, Southwest’s initial \$15 fares and simple point to point air service were hard to beat and quickly gained popularity amongst Valley residents.

Mayor Boswell says Kelleher’s vision of providing low cost, reliable, and convenient air service helped Valley International Airport become the airport of choice for Valley travelers. “Next month we will celebrate our 44th year anniversary of a partnership that has made VIA what it is

today. We are eternally grateful that Mr. Kelleher and his partners chose Harlingen back in the '70s.

In its 48th year of service, the Dallas based air carrier continues to be one of the best airlines in the U.S. with more than 58,000 employees and an annual customer base topping 120 million passengers according to its website.

The Mayor says by making air travel accessible to first time passengers, Kelleher and his team changed commercial aviation.

The City of Harlingen extends the deepest of sympathies to the entire Southwest Airlines family.

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