



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 21, 2026

**Contact:** Irma Chapa, Director of Communications / C: 956-995-2815 / E: [ichapa@mcallen.net](mailto:ichapa@mcallen.net)

**Sun, Sand & Spinning Balloons: Wild Christmas is 75 Days Away!**  
***Discover the characters set to spin at the South Padre Island Vuelta Zone, plus  
the newest pup earning a place on Santa's Good List.***

Holiday cheer is making waves on the coast! The City of McAllen convened upon South Padre Island to celebrate our partnership for the 2026 McAllen Holiday Parade, presented by H-E-B and powered by Bert Ogden. The event featured the first phase of this year's giant helium balloon lineup, a spotlight on the parade's signature Vuelta tradition and the latest announcement from Santa's Good List.

With the parade set for Saturday, December 5, organizers are preparing to welcome more than 267,000 spectators for Wild Christmas, a celebration inspired by the magic of nature and filled with giant balloons, music, lights and holiday memories.

South Padre Island is a fitting partner for this year's theme, which celebrates the beauty of nature and wildlife. The island is home to conservation and educational organizations, including the South Padre Island Birding, Nature Center & Alligator Sanctuary, Sea Turtle Inc., the Dolphin Research and Sea Life Nature Center, and the RGV Reef Project.

The partnership also celebrates the South Padre Island Vuelta Zone, where spectators will cheer "Vuelta" to make giant character balloons spin. First introduced as McAllen's official balloon-spinning tradition at the zone, the Vuelta has become a signature part of the parade experience. This year, 39 giant helium character balloons are expected to spin for the crowd.

City leaders revealed the first phase of the 2026 Wild Christmas balloon lineup, beginning with the Wild Christmas Friends, led by South Padre Island's own Ridley the Sea Turtle. Joining Ridley are RePete the Parrot and Big Jelly the Jellyfish.

The Vuelta Balloon Superstars will bring more familiar faces to the celebration, including:

- The Very Hungry Caterpillar
- The Angry Birds — Red, Chuck and Jay
- Horton from Dr. Seuss' *Horton Hears a Who!*
- Max & Ruby, and
- Garfield

**-MORE-**

## ***Page 2 of 2: Sun, Sand & Spinning Balloons: Wild Christmas Is on Its Way!***

More characters from the full balloon lineup will be announced in the weeks to come. Adding a little extra holiday cheer, the City also revealed the newest name on Santa's Good List: Sushi the Boston Terrier Elf. Sushi's family nominated him for his cuddles and for teaching his younger brothers how to be good boys. As the latest giveaway winner, Sushi's family received a four-pack of tickets to the McAllen Holiday Parade.

Pet owners can follow the parade's social media pages for more opportunities to enter their furry friends in the Santa's Good List giveaway.

As Wild Christmas approaches, families are invited to make plans for the parade and continue the celebration at South Padre Island, where holiday festivities await throughout the season. There's no holiday like an island holiday!

For more information and updates, visit [mcallenholidayparade.com](http://mcallenholidayparade.com) and follow the McAllen Holiday Parade on social media.

The McAllen Holiday Parade is presented by H-E-B and powered by Bert Ogden Auto Group, and proudly sponsored by McAllen International Airport, South Padre Island CVB, Reliant and Lone Star National Bank. Additional sponsors include Budweiser-L&F Distributors, McAllen International Bridge System, McAllen Public Utility, Metro McAllen, McAllen Public Works, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Lone Star Ambulance, Matt's Building Materials, PepsiCo, J. Gonzalez Injury Attorneys, South Texas ISD, South Texas College, McDonald's, Driscoll Children's Hospital, Chick-fil-A Rio Grande Valley, American Electric Power Foundation, McAllen Shines, IBC Bank, Lacks Furniture, Visit McAllen, Hermes, Peña Eye Institute, McAllen ISD, Linebarger Attorneys at Law, PNC Bank, O'Reilly Auto Parts, McAllen Economic Development Corporation, Rhodes Enterprises & Esperanza Homes, Pollux Castor Creative, Explore McAllen, Palenque Group, Halff Associates, B2Z Engineering, Carollo Engineers, Whataburger, Sports and SpawGlass.

###

### **About the City of McAllen**

Founded in 1904 and incorporated in 1911, the City of McAllen has grown from a small agricultural community into one of the most vibrant and fastest-growing cities along the U.S.–Mexico border. Known as the “City of Palms,” McAllen serves as a hub for international trade, retail, tourism, and culture in the Rio Grande Valley. Today, the city employs more than 2,600 dedicated public servants across 41 departments, delivering essential services to a community of more than 150,000 residents. McAllen city leaders remain committed to transparent governance, fiscal responsibility, and enhancing quality of life through innovation, infrastructure, and community engagement. For more information, visit [www.mcallen.net](http://www.mcallen.net) and follow us on social media @cityofmcallen