



May 12, 2007 - 2:43AM

**Award to keep Fender legacy alive:
3 people to be honored with Freddy Fender Humanitarian Award**

By EDWINA P. GARZA

SAN BENITO — Three Cameron County residents will be honored next month with a Freddy Fender Humanitarian Award at a fund-raiser for the South Texas Adult Resource and Training Center.

Ron Rogers, the president and CEO of the START Center and friend of the late musician, said the award would keep Fender's legacy alive.

"Freddy Fender was so important to this organization," he said. "It's how the Freddy Fender scholarship started."

The START Center, originally the San Benito Literacy Center, received plenty of help from the San Benito native.

"He became a real champion for literacy," Rogers said of Fender on Friday.

"He was just amazing, very intelligent, and an avid reader when he was ill. He was a humanitarian. He put his money where his mouth was."

Seeing firsthand the work Fender did for the center, staff members decided it would be fitting to create an award in Fender's honor.

"What better way to honor a man who never forgot his roots or his hometown," Rogers said.

"What better way to honor his memory? We created this award for people like him, people that understand the bigger picture."

Nominations for the award came from START staff members as well as the community. Two out of the three who will be honored this year are "under the radar."

"(These people) have demonstrated and understood what philanthropy is," Rogers said.

Next year, the award may be given to two people or just one individual. Rogers said the START center hopes to create a grass roots, community-driven effort for naming future nominees.

At the ceremony, which will be held June 2 at Los Ebanos Preserve, Fender's friend and musician Domingo Samudio, known as Sam the Sham, will be the guest of honor.

"He just wanted to be here," Rogers said of Samudio.

Samudio, Rogers said, may speak to the audience, read a poem and even perform.

Fender's family, including his wife Evangelina, will also attend.

There are 250 tickets, at \$100 each. Along with honoring Fender's legacy, the event's goal is fund-raising for the START Center.

The ceremony will cost the organization \$5,000. The \$20,000 the center hopes to raise will go toward maintaining the building, including fixing a leak and purchasing new computers for the computer lab.

Rogers said that he anticipates that the award will put an additional spotlight on Fender.

"It'll present another side of Freddy," he said.

Fender died Oct. 14 at age 69 at his Corpus Christi home after a battle with lung cancer. He is buried in San Benito City Cemetery.