

Arnaldo Amaro

Hidalgo County Wellness Program Champion of the Month

As he gets older, Arnaldo Amaro is well aware that his body is not what it used to be.

“It’s more about the portion control,” he said. “I lived that life so long of getting two hamburgers or instead of four tacos, give me six. Even though I wasn’t hungry, I’d still eat them, because I knew I’d burn them anyway by going to the gym. Not anymore.”

Amaro’s view on wellness has changed since his younger days on the basketball court. He was heavily involved in many other sports from his time in middle school and after high school.

“I’m just a sports nut by heart,” Amaro stated. “I did everything from baseball, football, basketball, track. Basketball was my passion growing up.”

He grew up in La Villa but his family were migrant workers. His family would travel north seasonally and at a young age believed that if he wanted to make a better living, he would need to move north.

After he graduated from high school, Amaro did not go to college right away. While doing migrant work, he ended up making the decision to settle in Michigan. There, he participated in recreational leagues in basketball, softball, golfing, and flag football.

“Whether it was just going to the park and doing



Arnaldo Amaro
Policy & Training Division Manager
Department of Human Resources

pick-up games, joining rec leagues – I always did something,” he said. “I would run at least two to three miles every day after work. I always did a lot.”

Also during his time in Michigan, he married and had two daughters. It was 10 years after high school that Amaro decided to enroll in the University of Michigan. He pursued a degree in human resources and business management.

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After graduating from the university, he made a visit to the Valley and connected with some old friends and acquaintances. Amaro mentioned as he got older, although he had come to love living in Michigan, he contemplated returning to the Valley.

“I was at the point in my life where I wasn’t really considering coming back,” Amaro said recalling a time he was stuck at the McAllen airport during a delay. “I was just there sitting and I had this really sick feeling in my stomach like I didn’t want to leave. I had a job, I had a career, and other stuff going on in Michigan. And I told myself right then and there, ‘I’m going to try to move back.’”

Two years later, an opportunity presented itself. There was a job opening within the company he was working for located in San Antonio.

“I told them, if you’re going to move me back to Texas, it’s going to be home – the Valley,” he said. “I was surprised because they agreed to it.”

Amaro worked for that company for another three years while settling back home in La Villa. He took on other jobs over the years before applying for a job at Hidalgo County in early 2021. He obtained the position of the Policy and Training Division Manager for the Department of Human Resources.

Part of Amaro’s duties when he started in the new role was to research ways to revamp and promote the trainings. It was during that time that he became aware of the Hidalgo County Employee Wellness Program.

“At first it was the marketing for the program that intrigued me, but then I started looking at the material,” he recounted. “That’s how I kind of stumbled upon it.”

Amaro describes the program as being well-rounded, “My opinion of what is wellness has evolved. From mostly physical to now I focus more on my state of mind. Not that I’m not vigilant of my physical health, but it’s really more towards mental health. I really like that our Wellness Program really focuses on both aspects, which is staying in shape, and being physically active – with the challenges. Then there is also the nutrition part and then the employee assistance programs we have with wellness and counseling. It all ties back into overall wellness.”

At home, Amaro says his wife is his motivation to focus on his health. He admits that she is far more physically active than he is.

“We both work. We both get home and we’re tired – mentally and sometimes even physically. But she

gets home and pushes herself to get on the treadmill. She pushes herself to do the situps and lift weights. I see her and she says, 'I don't feel like getting on the treadmill.' I'm a bad influence and tell her, 'If you don't want to do it, don't get on.'" Amaro chuckled. "But she does it. She's a big and positive influence because she does that every single day."

Amaro loves food and loves to cook. He knows he can't eat the way he used to eat. He recalls the time he was living by himself when he was younger.

"I like going to the grocery store and buying my own food, going home and cooking it. But what would happen is I would overspend. I would throw a lot of my groceries away because it was just me," he said. "I started to do the math. I've always been on a budget and it just made more financial sense to just buy something at a restaurant and that would always be fast food."

He says he is now very selective about what he eats and works on his portions.

Along with making an effort to eat healthy, Amaro says about 70% of his wellness focus is on his mental health. With demands at work, he does his best to practice disconnecting.

"I preach this a lot in our trainings," he said. "The more I practice [to disconnect], the more it becomes a habit. Even though issues are going to arise, but just looking at it more from a bird's eye view and think, 'OK, what is the worst that can happen because of this?' And being realistic about it. Can this wait? And ultimately, slowing down."

Amaro understands the mentality of things needing to get done fast but stresses that if it can wait, don't rush it. He describes a simple activity that puts him at ease.

"Building a fire. I love to cook out. I have a little barbeque pit and when there's nothing to cook, I light a fire," he said. "I'll sit out there and just watch TV and, you know how you get it going, but then the fire dies but then all of a sudden the oxygen kicks in or the wind picks up and the fire takes off. That stuff puts me at ease like you wouldn't believe or just smelling the smoke. It puts me in a state of mind – just calm."

Those who want to live a better quality life, Amaro says, should take a look at what the Employee Wellness Program has to offer.

"Hidalgo County has really invested a lot of resources into its employees. The [wellness] program is a prime example of it," he said. "Being able to call somebody and say, 'Hey, can I schedule a meeting because I really want to reevaluate how I'm eating or my physical ability right now?' It's here! You don't have to go to [a third] party or vendor."

He added that there is always room for improvement, even for those who know they eat healthy and workout regularly.

"There's always something to learn," he added. "Someone shared with me they went to a presentation and they said, 'Oh my god! There's all these things. I didn't know we could go to the dentist in Mexico and some of it will be covered [by our insurance].'"

Amaro hopes county employees will attend at least one wellness presentation if they can and added, "Get plenty of rest when you can. Don't stress over the little stuff, even though the little stuff does matter. Just let it go. Just let your mind be free as much as you can. Enjoy life while you can, because we're here on borrowed time. Whatever makes you happy – do it."