

## OPINION

# A border champion: Honoring Gerry Schwebel's legacy of leadership and vision

By Daniel Covarrubias

In the vibrant community of U.S.-Mexico trade, certain individuals stand out for their professional accomplishments and unwavering commitment to fostering cross-border cooperation and economic growth. Gerry Schwebel is undoubtedly one such figure.

As I reflect on nearly two decades of knowing and working alongside Gerry, I am struck by his profound impact on our border region, the field of international trade, and countless professionals like me who have had the privilege of learning from his example.

Gerry Schwebel's name has become synonymous with expertise in international trade, transportation, and finance, particularly in the context of U.S.-Mexico relations. As Executive Vice President of the Corporate International Division of the International Bank of Commerce (IBC Bank), Gerry has been a driving force behind initiatives that have shaped the economic landscape of our border region. His influence extends far beyond the confines of banking, touching on areas as diverse as industrial development, transportation, and public policy.

He has been a vocal advocate for our region in the halls of power, presenting expert testimony before Congress on critical issues such as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), transportation and logistics, international finance, and U.S. immigration reform. His ability to articulate the different areas of border economics and trade policy has made him a sought-after voice



Courtesy/Dr. Daniel Covarrubias

**Dr. Daniel Covarrubias and Gerry Schwebel address the audience during the 2024 International Congress on Logistics and Supply Chain on Tuesday, Sept. 10, 2024.**

in major business publications across North America.

What sets Gerry apart is not just his extensive knowledge but his ability to bridge gaps — between nations, between public and private sectors, and between academia and industry. He also has a deep-rooted connection to our border region and the ability to bring its realities to life for others.

A story Gerry once shared with me perfectly encapsulates this. He recounted participating in a trade negotiation talk, entering a room filled with Fortune 500 company CEOs. As all eyes turned to him, wondering who he was and where he came from, Gerry's response was simple yet profound. He told them he was the only one in that room who lived and felt trade on a daily basis.

He explained how IBC's main corporate office sits off I-35, about a mile from the Rio Grande River and adjacent to Canadian Pacific Kansas City's railroad track. Every time a train passes by, coming and going into Mexico—which happens multiple times a day—the building shakes.

This constant reminder, along with the tens of thousands of trucks that commute daily on I-35, serves as a tangible connection to Port Laredo's nonstop trade flows. In that moment,

Gerry wasn't just a banking executive or a trade expert—he embodied our vibrant, dynamic border region.

This anecdote perfectly characterizes Gerry's love and passion for his region. It's this lived experience, this intimate under-

standing of the pulse of cross-border trade, that has made him such an effective advocate and leader. For Gerry, international trade isn't just about numbers or policies—it's about the everyday realities of life on the border.

For me and many others in our field, Gerry has been more than just a colleague or an industry leader — he has been a mentor, a guide, and an inspiration. His willingness to share his knowledge, nurture talent, and champion the next generation of border leaders is a testament to his character and vision for our region.

My first professional encounter with Gerry, around 2005, perfectly summarizes his deep community roots and ability to connect with people across generations. As we were introduced, Gerry immediately lit

up, like he often does, telling me he knew my father very well and admired him for his love for Nuevo Laredo, its institutions, and his financial knowledge. As he progressed into the story, I quickly realized he was talking about my grandfather, not my father.

This mix-up quickly became a running joke between us, humorously highlighting our age difference. But more importantly, it underscored the depth of Gerry's connections to our community and my family. It was a moment that set the tone for our relationship in the years to come — one built on mutual respect, shared history, and a touch of good-natured humor.

One of Gerry's most admirable qualities is his forward-thinking approach. In an era of rapid technological change and shifting global dynamics, Gerry has consistently advocated for innovation in cross-border trade. He understands that the future of our region depends on our ability to adapt, to leverage new technologies, and to think creatively about the challenges we face.

This vision is evident in his support for initiatives that bring together industry, academia, and government. His involvement with the Texas A&M Transportation Institute Advisory Council, his role on the Board of Advisors for the Texas A&M International University A.R. Sanchez School of Business, and just this past week, his service as President of the International Congress on Logistics and Supply Chain (CiLOG 2024) demonstrate his belief in the power of education and research to drive economic prog-

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# LEGACY

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ress.

Gerry's impact goes beyond his professional achievements. He embodies the spirit of civic responsibility that is so crucial to the life of our border communities. His involvement in organizations like the North America Strategy for Competitiveness (NASCO), where he served as Chairman, and the U.S.-Mexico Chamber of Commerce, where he held the

position of Bi-National Director, speaks to his commitment to fostering collaboration across borders.

His contributions have not gone unnoticed. Awards such as the "Advancing International

Trade Award" from NASBITE and the Russell H. Perry Award from the Texas A&M Transportation Institute are just a few of his many recognitions. Yet, those who know Gerry understand that these well-deserved accolades are secondary to his genuine passion for the work and his commitment to our border community.

As I find myself sharing panels and keynotes with Gerry these days, discussing the future of U.S.-Mexico trade and the challenges facing our region, I am continually inspired by his insight, energy, and unwavering optimism. He has a unique ability to cut through the noise, focus on what truly matters, and rally diverse stakeholders around a shared vision. And always, he brings that instinctive

understanding of border life — the rumble of trains, the flow of trucks, the daily rhythm of cross-border commerce — to every conversation.

In an era where borders are often seen as lines of division, Gerry Schwebel has spent his life and career proving that they can be bridges of opportunity. His work embodies the idea that our strength lies in our connections — between nations, industries, and people. As we face the complex challenges of the 21st century — from supply chain disruptions to technological shifts and environmental concerns — leaders like Gerry remind us of the power of collaboration, vision, and perseverance.

The lessons are clear for those of us who have had the privilege

of working alongside Gerry. Success in international trade is not just about understanding markets and policies; it's about building relationships, fostering trust, and always keeping the broader community in mind. It's about seeing beyond immediate challenges to the long-term potential of our region.

As we look to the future of U.S.-Mexico relations and the evolving landscape of international trade, we would do well to follow Gerry Schwebel's example. His legacy is not just in the policies he's shaped or the organizations he's led but in the countless individuals he has inspired to see the border not as a dividing line but as a bond of opportunity, innovation, and shared prosperity.

As the Laredo Economic Development Corporation honors Gerry Schwebel this week as a recipient of the 2024 Pathways for Trade Ambassador Honoree, we celebrate not just a remarkable career but a vision of what our border region can be — a place of dynamism, cooperation, and boundless potential.

For those of us who continue to work in this field, Gerry's example serves as both a guide and an inspiration, challenging us to think bigger, to reach further, and to never lose sight of the human connections that underpin all our efforts.

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