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~J. GONZALEZ

Family: Former La Feria official lived, died on his terms

BY FRANCISCO GUAJARDO
SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

José de Jesús Zuñiga, or Jesse as his friends and family called him, was determined to not die in the hospital if he ever contracted COVID-19. He unequivocally told his wife Maricela, who bore close witness to his life of more than 32 years of marriage, “If I ever get the virus, I will not go to the hospital.”

Jesse feared the deadly nature of the virus, but he feared dying alone more than the virus itself. And, on Aug. 7, 2020, he succumbed to the virus, at his La Feria home, as Maricela valiantly attempted to rescue him. “He just stopped breath-



Zuniga

ing, and I couldn’t do anything to help,” Maricela said.

The tragedy of Jesse’s finality differed dramatically from how he lived his life, his jovial personality and his engaging sense of humor. Jesse was “definitely funny,” Maricela intimates, as she describes how he came into the world on Dec. 11, 1969. He was delivered by a midwife on Sixth St. in La Feria.

BEARING WITNESS

“He weighed in at over 9 pounds,” Maricela said, as if showing up as a plump baby was Jesse’s first punch line.

Jesse grew up in the border community of Santa Maria, lived the life of a small-town boy who married his first love, and

worked hard to love her until the day he died.

“Jesse was a good provider,” recalls Maricela. “He learned how to work hard from the time he was 13 or 14, when he worked as a migrant farmworker in the fields of Michigan and New York; he was not afraid of hard work.”

Through work, Jesse also gained his life education.

“My husband and I first met Jesse when he worked

at Burton Auto Supply. First thing that impressed you was his personality,” said Gloria Casas, a longtime resident of La Feria who bore close witness to Jesse and Maricela for the past 30 years.

“But the most impressive thing was that Jesse always remembered what people needed,” Gloria said.

See **ZUNIGA** | 4A



Yamii Rodríguez | Aeromed via AP

This shows the collapsed Radio Telescope in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. The telescope that has played a key role in discoveries for more than half a century collapsed, falling onto the vast reflector dish more than 400 feet below.

UTRGV bids farewell to historic radio telescope

BY STEVE CLARK
STAFF WRITER

The collapse of the massive radio telescope at the Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico on Dec. 1 was felt more than 2,000 miles away in Brownsville, in a figurative sense at least.

The Arecibo Remote Command Center (ARCC), founded at the University of Texas at Brownsville in 2006, was named for the 57-year-old telescope, the largest in the world until the Five-hundred-meter Aperture Spherical Telescope (FAST) came online in southern China in September 2019.

ARCC was created by former UTB/University of Texas Rio Grande Valley physics associate professor Rick Jenet to get students involved in radio astronomy research at an early stage, according to Téviet Creighton, director of UTRGV’s Center for Advanced Radio Astronomy, which grew out of ARCC and now includes ARCC and the university’s STARGATE radio ground station project.

“One of the first things (Jenet) did was he got a significant grant to create (ARCC), which was a small facility on campus for a research-in-education program that was focused on getting students from the high school, undergraduate and graduate level all involved in research right from the start of their careers,” Creighton said.

When UTB became

UTRGV, CARA was the first research center incorporated into the new university, he said.

The telescope, part of the observatory also known as the National Astronomy and Ionosphere Center and owned by U.S. National Science Foundation, sustained damage to its 300-meter dish in August when a cable supporting the overhead receiver platform came loose. Planned repairs were abandoned when another cable snapped on Nov. 6, compromising the telescope’s structural integrity and posing a hazard. The NSF was working on a plan to dismantle the historic instrument when it collapsed.

Creighton said CARA students were involved in a number of discoveries working with the Arecibo telescope remotely.

“We discovered a lot of interesting exotic stars, including one particularly interesting thing, which was a double neutron star system that we discovered using data from Arecibo — one of our students in fact,” he said.

Creighton noted that UTRGV students were using the Arecibo telescope until it was knocked offline, though the ARCC program was no longer dependent on the instrument for research.

“It was still an important part of our research portfolio, but we had diversified quite a bit since the early days, so a lot of our

own radio astronomy research and radio technology development research at CARA, we’ve got a number of programs that involve basically radio observatories and systems that we are designing and building ourselves,” he said. “A lot of our research is done using instruments that we have designed and built.”

The first radio observatory built by CARA students and faculty is the Low Frequency All Sky Monitor, or LoFASM, which consists of five stations scattered across the United States, each comprised of a “phased array” telescope, Creighton said.

“We collect data from that, so we have a lot of students working on that, and that was basically designed and built by our faculty and students and deployed across the country,” he said.

Another project under development is the STARGATE ground station, which will feature a 20-element phased array that — like the Arecibo telescope but unlike most radio astronomy instruments — will be capable of transmitting and as well as receiving. Arecibo’s most famous transmission was the 1974 Arecibo Message, the most powerful broadcast in history, which beamed basic information about the telescope, human beings, DNA and Earth’s solar system directly to the M13 star cluster 21,000 light-

years from Earth.

The STARGATE demonstration project represents the latest trend in radio astronomy and radio communication, in which large arrays of antennas controlled by computer software create the same effect as a giant dish telescope or even several smaller dishes, Creighton said.

“CARA and the STARGATE project within CARA has been focused on developing that technology so that we’re not necessarily as dependent on large dishes,” he said. “The hardware for our STARGATE ground station is going to be located on campus in a field outside the Casa Bella apartments, so it’s not going to be anywhere the scale of Arecibo obviously.”

The array will be used mostly for communicating with spacecraft though it potentially could also be used for radio astronomy research, Creighton said.

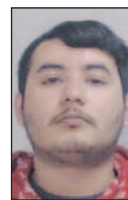
CARA students and faculty are also working to develop technology for use in space. The Laser and Instrument Science working group, for instance, is developing laser systems for precision measurement and communications, Creighton said. Another group of students is looking into using CubeSat, a type of miniaturized satellite for space research, to track orbital debris, he said.

See **ARECIBO** | 4A

18-year-old loses bid for lower bond in murder case

BY MARK REAGAN
STAFF WRITER

An 18-year-old man charged in a November hit-and-run turned murder sought a lower bond Friday morning, but the judge presiding over the case denied the request, records show.



Solis

Jesse Solis appeared via video-conferencing in front of state District Judge Luis M. Singleterry to ask that his \$1 million bond on a murder charge for the death of 41-year-old John Joseph Young be reduced.

Edinburg police accuse Solis and his 16-year-old cousin of beating Young to death after he hit Solis’ 2007 Buick on Nov. 6. The newspaper is not identifying the juvenile suspect.

Authorities there ini-

tially investigated the case as a fatal hit-and-run, issuing a news release at one point asking for the public’s help in identifying Solis’ vehicle.

The fatal incident happened between 11 and 11:15 p.m. at the intersection of 21st Avenue and Cano Street.

As the investigation developed, a man went to police and told them that his coworker mentioned that his brother, the juvenile, and another man had beaten up someone in front of the La Espiga Bakery, according to a probable cause affidavit.

Investigators found the coworker, who provided a statement saying that his cousin “arrived at his house upset in his gray 4-door car at about 11:00 p.m. because a male that was in front of the bakery had thrown himself at his car and had broken the mirror,” the affidavit states.

See **BOND** | 4A

Florida man pleads guilty to using mail for smuggling weapons

BY LORENZO ZAZUETA-CASTRO
STAFF WRITER

In a court hearing Friday, Brett Keith McGinnis pleaded true to one count of smuggling goods into the country, specifically firearms, ammunition and grenade cartridges, records show.

McGinnis, 44, of Ormond Beach, Florida, admitted he mailed ammunition, firearms and firearm parts, or caused them to be mailed to co-conspirators in McAllen who then would export them into Mexico, according to a news release from the U.S. Attorney’s Office Southern District of Texas.

“From on or about May 12 through Sept. 13, 2018, federal agents seized more than 6,000 rounds of various caliber ammunition, 1,100 saw links (5.56mm), 35 firearm magazines, three firearms, multiple upper and lower receivers and other firearms accesso-

ries that were destined for Mexico,” the release states.

As part of his plea, the Florida man also admitted to shipping 60 “practice” M781 grenade cartridges (40mm) and firearms prior to May 2018 that were intended to be exported into Mexico. M781 practice rounds are considered explosive materials requiring a federal explosives license to transport.

McGinnis did not possess such a license to transport explosives or to export defense articles.

U.S. District Judge Micaela Alvarez accepted the plea and has set sentencing for Feb. 12, 2021. At that time, McGinnis will face up to 10 years in prison and a possible \$250,000 maximum fine.

McGinnis, who has been free on bond since at least March 2019, was permitted to remain on bond pending sentencing hearing.

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Corps commanders tour Harlingen facility in show of support

BY RICK KELLEY
STAFF WRITER

HARLINGEN — The new commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers district for Texas recently visited the Port of Harlingen, a demonstration of support for smaller ports which in the past have felt neglected by Corps' priorities.

Southwestern Division Commander Brig. Gen. Christopher G. Beck and Galveston District Commander Col. Timothy R. Vail with other Corps officials visited the local port on Dec. 1.

Beck assumed command of the Southwestern Division, based in Dallas, in June and the port visit is part of an outreach initiative to improve communication and project management between the Corps and port directors.

"We have to step back and see how we move forward together," Beck said. "(The Corps) has a great capability to bring resources and we want to see just how we can magnify the impact we can have."

"Our goal is to move toward a strategic approach rather than a project-by-project basis," he added. "This is a great opportunity for us to leverage the tools we have to make (the ports) successful."

Corps funding for needed but expensive dredging, at least at the smaller ports like Harlingen, had been difficult to obtain for at least a decade. But that is changing, and last month the Corps and port finished dredging



Maricela Rodriguez | Valley Morning Star

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Port of Harlingen partnered up in November to improve navigability of the Arroyo Colorado by dredging it and the turning basin, as seen in this Nov. 5 photo.

“Our proximity to the maquiladoras and Harlingen Industrial Park puts us in a prime location to increase our capacity and commodities. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is crucial in assistance and programs that will improve our infrastructure to take advantage of more business opportunities.”

Walker Smith
Harlingen port director

the Arroyo Colorado and the port's turning basin to depths of 14 and 16 feet.

The channel depth of the arroyo has to be maintained at an authorized depth of 12 feet to safely allow barge traffic — the barges draw 9 feet — in and out of the port.

"We really appreciate the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers coming to see and hear from us firsthand," said Alan Johnson, chairman of the port board. "The Port of Harlingen's business is really expanding and the USACE plays a vital part in how

we grow to accommodate business. Especially their help in maintaining our channel."

"They completed dredging here last month and it has already made a significant difference for our customers," he added.

The Corps also began a \$19 million dredging project this year at the Port of Port Mansfield, where siltation of the channel there became so bad that some larger sportfishing boats couldn't navigate the sand bars to enter or leave harbor.

Ocean-going barges bring in gas and diesel, sand, cement and fertilizer to the Port of Harlingen and haul out cotton, grain and sugar.

"Our proximity to the maquiladoras and Harlingen Industrial Park puts us in a prime location to increase our capacity and commodities," Port Director Walker Smith said. "The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is crucial in assistance and programs that will improve our infrastructure to take advantage of more business opportunities."



John Raoux | The Associated Press

A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket on a resupply mission to the International Space Station lifts off from pad 39A at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Sunday, Dec. 6.

Double Dragons: SpaceX launches space station supplies

BY MARCIA DUNN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — SpaceX launched a newer, bigger version of its Dragon supply ship to the International Space Station on Sunday, marking the first time the company has two capsules in orbit at the same time.

The Dragon — packed with Christmas treats and presents — should reach the space station on Monday, joining the Dragon that delivered four astronauts last month.

"Dragons everywhere you look," said Kenny Todd, NASA's deputy space station program manager.

With NASA's commercial crew program officially under way, SpaceX expects to always have at least one Dragon capsule at the space station.

SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket blasted off with the latest Dragon from NASA's Kennedy Space Center, where coronavirus precautions

kept staff to a minimum. The first-stage booster — making its fourth flight — landed on an ocean platform several minutes after the late-morning liftoff. It was first used back in May for the first astronaut launch by Elon Musk's company.

The 6,400-pound shipment includes billions of microbes and crushed asteroid samples for a biomineral study, a new medical device to provide rapid blood test results for astronauts in space, and a privately owned and operated chamber to move experiments as big as refrigerators outside the orbiting lab. Forty mice also are flying for bone and eye studies, two areas of weaknesses for astronauts during long space stays.

Todd said all this research is "the ultimate Christmas present" for NASA astronaut Kate Rubins, a virus hunter who performed the first DNA sequencing in space a few years ago.

Texas officials disagree on whether wild animal killed man

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LIPAN, Texas — Texas wildlife officials on Sunday said there was no evidence that a mountain lion or any wild animal killed a 28-year-old man, disputing a medical examiner's preliminary finding in the case.

"It appears we have two conflicting reports from two agencies that are experts in their field," the Hood County Sheriff's Office said in a statement Sunday posted on Face-

book.

The sheriff's office said it will wait for the final autopsy report but that, for now, it's standing by the preliminary finding from the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's office, which ruled out a suicide and a homicide. The sheriff's office had said earlier that the autopsy's preliminary findings said Christopher Allen Whiteley died from a wild animal attack, possibly by a mountain lion.

The sheriff's office said

its investigation is continuing and that investigators are gathering pictures and statements from locals who have seen and captured on film images of mountain lions.

The sheriff's office had said deputies found Whiteley's body on Thursday, a day after he went missing near Lipan, located 50 miles southwest of Fort Worth.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department said in a Sunday afternoon statement that its experts had

inspected the scene and didn't find any evidence of a mountain lion attack at the location.

"None of the evidence reviewed by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department indicates a predatory attack by a mountain lion or other wild animal," TPWD spokeswoman Megan Radke said in an email.

TPWD said that a U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services biologist also came to the same conclusion as its staff.

ZUNIGA

From Page 3A

Working for Burton for more than 23 years, Jesse developed the skill of knowing people, and knowing their needs.

"When we married, he was only 16, so he was

just a kid," Maricela said. "But he always had a good heart, and he had a sense of purpose to help others."

He built much of that skill set through his interactions with people at the auto parts store. He became a public person by working there — and that

became his education.

"He was a natural at dealing with people," Gloria said. "Una manera that helped him be a good public servant."

Jesse's je ne sais quoi facilitated his way to two terms on the La Feria City Commission, and to a seat as a member-at-large of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council.

"He represented a new breed of leaders."

In the end, Jesse lived on his own terms, and he died on his own terms.

Maricela recalls, "Jesse

was often quoted as saying 'I was born in La Feria, I live in La Feria, and I will die in La Feria.'" Indeed, Jesse had it his way.

Que en paz descance José de Jesús Zuñiga. Rest in peace.

Francisco Guajardo, chief executive officer for the Museum of South Texas History at 200 N. Clossner Blvd. in Edinburg, authored this story as part of an ongoing series entitled Bearing Witness.

The museum's effort aims to document some of the Rio Grande Valley lives lost to COVID-19.

For more information about the museum, visit MOSTHistory.org.

BOND

From Page 3A

A news release announcing Solis' arrest stated that Young's body had struck the side mirror of the vehicle before Solis and the juvenile returned and confronted Young, beating the man and leaving him in the roadway.

"Investigator Moreno will testify (the man) stated that a short time later Jessie and (the juve-

nile) arrived back at the house with blood on their arms saying that they had just beaten up the male in front of the bakery," the probable cause affidavit states.

Police say Solis attempted to hide the car in his backyard behind some tree branches at his stepfather's behest.

Solis remains jailed.

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ARECIBO

From Page 3A


"We're also building a space environment simulator on campus that is going to be used for basically testing instruments and electronics and materials in a space-like environment," Creighton said.

Even though the program's research will continue without Arecibo, it's sad that the famous instrument will never transmit or receive again, even though the observatory itself remains along with its other scientific instruments that don't rely on the big dish, he said.

"It revolutionized a lot of our understanding of the solar system and our understanding of Earth

as well just from what we learned from looking at other planets in our solar system," Creighton said. "It was very important in understanding a lot of the issues here on Earth, especially environmental issues. It contributed a great deal to that."

"I've heard the NSF say that they're committed to keeping the rest of the facility operational for the remaining instruments, but it's true that the big dish was really the heart of the operation. It is a loss for science and it is a loss for our research, but more sort of an emotional and sentimental loss than a practical impact in our research program, because we have so many other things that we can switch to."



Extended Coverage

by B.R. Whisenant

SERIOUS INJURIES AMONG U.S. INJURED E-SCOOTER USERS

A new study looked at injuries incurred among U.S. e-Scooter users. More than four out of 10 of the injuries studied (42%) were moderate to severe, as measured by the Median Injury Severity Score. One person in the study was critically injured. The bulk of the injuries (42%) involved fractures to the leg bones (tibia and fibula); the bony protrusions at the ankle; the collar bone; shoulder blades; and the forearm bone. Half the patients (53%) with these injuries required surgery. Facial fractures were the next most common type of injury: 27 (26%) patients had these, most of which were mild, but required surgery in six (22%) cases. Nearly one in five (18%) patients had a bleed on the brain, although none required surgery, and a further 17 people were concussed. Five other serious injuries included hemothorax (blood in the space between the lungs and the chest wall); tears in the spleen; kidney injury; and neck injury. In all, one in three people required surgery. And while most (86%) were discharged home, six patients required long term nursing care/rehabilitation, and two needed care at home.

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