



**J. GONZÁLEZ** ★★★★★ **SUPPORT LOCAL JOURNALISM**  
**KEEPING THE RGV INFORMED IN TIME OF NEED!**

**“We at J. Gonzalez Injury Attorneys recognize, more than ever, the value of local journalism. Our community depends on steady and reliable voices to report the facts. Please join J. Gonzalez Injury Attorneys in supporting local journalism by reading The Monitor in print and at [www.themonitor.com](http://www.themonitor.com) for round-the-clock Coronavirus updates. Stay safe!”**

**~J. GONZALEZ**

## Family: Laughs, love filled couple’s final moments before dad died

BY FRANCISCO GUAJARDO  
SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

**BEARING WITNESS**

Enrique “Henry” Maldonado was born in Edinburg, raised in San Carlos, and sometime in 1969 met Margaret Gonzalez at a dance in Elsa.

“I loved to dance and was dancing with someone else at the time,” Margaret recalls. “But, Henry sought me out, we danced the night away, and spent the next 50 years together.”

When Henry fell victim to COVID-19 on Nov. 28, 2020, at DHR Health in Edinburg, he had just experienced the most glorious four-day period next to Margaret, who also checked into the same hospital after being diagnosed with the virus.

Margaret tells the story of Henry’s last days.

“We spent the last four days sharing a room at DHR,” Margaret said. “We told stories, laughed, and cried late into the night. Now, what am I supposed to do without him? We were married for 48 years.”

Omar, who also bore close witness to Henry as the first-born child, reports how the nurses at DHR described the energy coming from the Maldonado hospital room.

“The nurses said mom and dad were chatting like lovebirds, sometimes so loudly



Enrique Henry Maldonado

they thought they might be keeping other patients up at night. But they said, ‘you

know, they’re just enjoying each other,’ and decided to let them celebrate each other. That brought such peace to me,” Omar said.

Omar and his younger sister Yvette felt so grateful they bought Christmas trees for DHR staff and patients in the COVID-19 unit.

“Our father died with such dignity. The healthcare providers were simply heroic, and that story should be told over and over again. They don’t get the credit they deserve for putting their lives on the line every day to give others a chance to live. We saw that firsthand,” Omar said. “In a time of worry and uncertainty, the staff made every effort to make our parents feel as comfortable as possible. Their efforts should

be recognized.”

While Henry succumbed to the ravaging virus, Margaret lived to tell of the horrors that played out before her eyes.

“I saw something like a war zone in the hospital. It was horrible. Humongous machines everywhere, patients crying out for help. I tell people, you have no idea what this is like. Wear a mask!” she said.

As DHR was besieged, Omar textures the war-like metaphor.

“It was like a war zone with love,” he said. “The nurses and staff were so humane in an environment that is almost impossible to manage. But they did.”

“The scene was horrible, but I’ll be honest, I cried

when the doors opened, and the nurses and other workers formed lines when it was time to leave the hospital,” Margaret said. “While they were happy for me to be released, I knew I was leaving Henry behind. I didn’t want to leave.”

With seemingly opposite personalities, Henry and Margaret made the perfect couple.

“My mom can fill a room with her presence and big hearty laugh, while dad was soft spoken, strong in his conviction but soft in delivery,” said Yvette, Henry and Margaret’s daughter.

“Dad was a gentle giant, more reserved than mom, but a go-getter, a

See **MALDONADO** | 4A



Rick Bowmer | The Associated Press

A man carries his weapon during a second amendment gun rally at Utah State Capitol on Feb. 8, 2020, in Salt Lake City.

## States eye allowing concealed carry of guns without a permit

BY LINDSAY WHITEHURST  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY — Republican lawmakers in several more states want to loosen gun restrictions by allowing people to carry concealed firearms without having to get a permit, continuing a trend that gun control advocates call dangerous.

Fifteen states already allow concealed carry without a permit, and lawmakers in nine others have proposed allowing or expanding the practice. GOP governors are backing the changes in Utah

and Tennessee. Another bill expanding permitless carry in Montana has passed the state House.

Most states require people to do things like get weapons training and undergo a background check to get a permit to carry a gun hidden by a jacket or inside a purse. Groups like the National Rifle Association and state lawmakers who support gun rights argue those requirements are ineffective and undermine Second Amendment protections.

The proposed changes come after gun sales hit his-

toric levels last summer — reflected in FBI background checks — amid uncertainty and safety concerns about the coronavirus pandemic, the struggling economy and protests over racial injustice. Since then, a violent mob stormed the U.S. Capitol.

Against that backdrop, the efforts to loosen concealed carry requirements are a frightening trend for Shannon Watts, founder of the gun control group Moms Demand Action.

“It is dangerous to allow people to carry hidden, loaded handguns possibly

without a background check or any training,” she said, adding that the annual rate of aggravated assaults with a firearm has increased 71% in Alaska since the state became the first to allow concealed carry without a permit in 2003.

The proposal in Utah would allow any U.S. citizen 21 and older to carry a concealed weapon without the now-required background check or weapons course. The bill does allow gun owners who want to carry a

See **GUN CARRY** | 4A

## Pharr man accused of killing infant indicted

STAFF REPORT

A grand jury has indicted a 36-year-old Pharr man on charges of capital murder of a person under 10 years old, murder and injury to a child.



Hernandez

U b e n c e R u b e n Hernandez is accused of killing 1-year-old Julius

Flores, who he was babysitting while the child’s mother went to the store.

The Donna Police Department arrested the man on Oct. 7, 2020 and allege Hernandez broke the infant’s spine “due to blunt force trauma” on Sept. 22 of that year at a residence in the 3700 block of East Business 83 in Donna.

When Hernandez appeared before Donna Municipal Judge Javier Garza,

he denied the charges, saying “Man, I didn’t do this s---, bro,” while sobbing.

Police, however, say he agreed to a voluntary interview and confessed.

Police also arrested Hernandez on Nov. 19, alleging that on Sept. 22, the same day the child died, that Hernandez pointed a gun at a woman named Patricia Ann Garces.

That complaint does not disclose the relation-

ship between Hernandez and Garces.

He faces a charge of deadly conduct over the allegation.

As for the capital murder charge, if convicted, Hernandez could face life in prison or the death sentence, should the Hidalgo County District Attorney’s Office choose to pursue it.

Hernandez, who remains jailed on a \$750,000 bond, is scheduled for arraignment on Feb. 10.

## State jobless rate declines; Valley lags behind

BY RICK KELLEY  
STAFF WRITER

Texas added jobs for the eighth straight month in December, with the unemployment rate falling to 7.2% from 8.1% the previous month, the Texas Workforce Commission reports.

Numbers in the Rio Grande Valley also improved in December, but the region still lags far behind the rest of the state as the slow recovery from the impact of COVID-19 continues.

The jobless rate for the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission Metropolitan Statistical Area was the highest in the state in December at 11.7%, although that was an improvement over November’s 12.5%.

In the Brownsville-Harlingen MSA, the rate dropped from 11.2% in November to 10.3% in December. Only Odessa at 11.5% and Beaumont-Port Arthur at 11% had higher rates.

Texas added 64,200 non-

agricultural positions in December.

“The private sector job growth we saw in December is promising,” said TWC Chairman Bryan Daniel.

In December, Professional and Business Services added 27,000 jobs. Trade, Transportation, and Utilities added 20,100 jobs and Education and Health Services added 6,600 jobs.

“This month’s job numbers prove that high-skilled workers are in-demand,” said TWC Commissioner Representing Labor Julian Alvarez.

The Amarillo MSA recorded December’s lowest unemployment rate among Texas MSAs with a non-seasonally adjusted rate of 4.9%, followed by the College Station-Bryan MSA with the second-lowest rate of 5.0%. The Austin-Round Rock MSA recorded the third-lowest rate of 5.1%.

rkelly@valleystar.com

## Local physician launches health video series

BY TRAVIS M. WHITEHEAD  
STAFF WRITER

BROWNSVILLE — Health and wellness in the Rio Grande Valley.

The topic is important enough in any scenario, but in the time of COVID-19 it’s more crucial than ever.

That’s why Dr. Christopher Romero, medical director of PanAmerican Clinical Research, has begun a new video series called, “Health and Wellness in the RGV.”

He’s already posted the first presentation, “5 Tips for Starting and Keeping a New Year’s Resolution,” on YouTube.

“Like all of us, I’ve watched the Rio Grande Valley get so heavily impacted by COVID-19 over this past year,” he says in the video.

“It’s been heart breaking,” he continues. “And many of us are still mourning the loss of family and loved ones and colleagues to this horrible pandemic.”

Romero then explains in the video that Cameron and Hidalgo counties were in the

top 10 locations in Texas for high mortality rates of COVID-19 patients in 2020.

“The sad truth is that this pandemic unroofed health issues that have been impacting our community for decades,” he said.

Talking later about the video series, Romero explained that COVID-19 has impacted the Hispanic community at a disproportionate level.

Several factors have contributed to this problem. It includes genetics, but also certain lifestyle habits that have contributed to a high level of obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure.

These and other health conditions can contribute to COVID-19 patients in the Valley having severe cases of the disease.

“It’s truly unfortunate that the population of the Rio Grande Valley has been at such a predisposed level for having severe disease in the midst of this pandemic,” Romero said. “The things that

See **VIDEOS** | 4A



## Increase in COVID-19 deaths slows somewhat in Texas

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN, Texas — There has been a decrease in the number of reported new deaths in Texas due to COVID-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus, according to the state health department.

There were 208 additional deaths reported Sunday after 407 new deaths were reported Saturday following three consecutive days of more than 1,200 new deaths, according to the department. The death toll stands at 34,322.

The health department reported more than 11,000 new virus cases for a total of 1.96 million since the pandemic began. The number

of COVID-19 patients hospitalized decline from 13,309 to 12,899.

The seven-day rolling average of deaths in Texas has risen during the past two weeks from 260.57 per day to 326.14, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. The state ranked ninth in the United States in the number of new cases per capita with 1,012.33 per 100,000 residents, according to the Johns Hopkins data.

The Johns Hopkins information also shows the positivity rate in Texas has declined from 24.89% to 16% and the seven-day rolling average of new cases fell from 23,043.57 per day to 18,771.57.

## 19 burned bodies found near Mexico-US border town

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CIUDAD VICTORIA, Mexico — Mexican authorities say they have found 19 shot and burned bodies near a town across the Rio Grande from Texas in an area that has seen violent territorial disputes between organized crime groups in recent years.

The Tamaulipas state prosecutor's office said

late Saturday that the bodies were discovered along a dirt road outside Camargo after residents reported a burning vehicle. Authorities found two vehicles on fire, one containing four bodies and the other 15. Some rifles were also found.

All had been shot, but shells were not found at the site, leading investigators to believe they were killed somewhere else.

## GUN CARRY

From Page 3A

concealed weapon out of state to get a permit to do so after a background check and safety course.

Newly elected GOP Gov. Spencer Cox has said he supports the idea, in contrast to his predecessor and fellow Republican Gary Herbert, who vetoed a similar bill in 2013.

Supporters of the change argue that other state laws against such things as felons having guns and anyone carrying a firearm while intoxicated are enough to ensure guns are used safely.

"I have that right to protect myself, the Constitution says we have the right. Why are we putting a barrier for law-abiding citizens?" said Rep. Walt Brooks, the Republican lawmaker sponsoring the bill that got an early nod of approval from a House committee Friday. The software company president has represented rural southern Utah for about four years.

He pointed to a multistate study published in 2018 by the Journal of the American College of Surgeons that found loosening concealed carry permit laws didn't lead to more homicides or violent crime. Utah does not require a permit for guns carried openly.

In Tennessee, Republican lawmakers are expected to push again to allow

most adults 21 and older to carry firearms — concealed or openly — without a license that now requires a background check and training.

GOP Gov. Bill Lee backed the idea last year, though the proposal and others were put on hold amid the pandemic.

The push in Tennessee came after the GOP-dominant General Assembly relaxed the state's handgun law in 2020 by allowing people to obtain a concealed-carry-only handgun permit that didn't require them to demonstrate the ability to fire a weapon.

In Montana, the House recently passed a bill to allow people to carry concealed firearms without a permit in most places.

Similar bills that would allow or expand concealed carry without a permit have been introduced in Texas, South Carolina, Florida, Indiana, Alabama and Georgia.

In Texas, where the NRA plans to incorporate soon and where some lawmakers bring concealed handguns to work at the state Capitol, the GOP has listed the issue as one of just eight legislative priorities. The idea has failed to gain traction for years, though, and with the pandemic promising to be the predominant force in the upcoming session, its prospects are once again uncertain.

## As Mexico enters the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, its vaccination plan takes a hit

BY KATE LINTHICUM  
LOS ANGELES TIMES

MEXICO CITY — Nearly a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, Mexico is entering its darkest days yet.

Hospitals in many states are near capacity. Ventilators and oxygen tanks are in scarce supply. More people are dying than ever before.

At a medical center set up on a Mexico City military base, morgue workers can't keep up.

"In the end you're just stacking people in piles," said Dr. Giorgio Alberto Franyuti Kelly, chief of biosecurity for the military, who treats patients at the makeshift hospital.

Large-scale vaccination is widely seen as the clearest way out. Yet this last week the government announced that its inoculation program — one of the most ambitious in Latin America — had essentially come to a standstill.

The country of 128 million people has received just 766,350 doses of vaccine, all produced by Pfizer-BioNTech.

That figure was supposed to hit 1.5 million by the end of the month, but Pfizer now says it can't meet that goal because it is remodeling one of its factories in Europe to eventually boost production.

Mexican officials described the delay as a minor setback and said shipments from Pfizer are expected to resume Feb. 15.

"It is simply going to be temporarily postponed," said Mexico's undersecretary of health, Dr. Hugo López-Gatell, who is leading the nation's pandemic response.

But health experts warned that the pause in vaccinations could have serious consequences, because roughly half a million medical workers who have received an initial dose will be forced to wait longer than is optimal for the critical second dose.



Marcus Yam | Los Angeles Times

Red Cross paramedics push a man with symptoms related to COVID-19 in a stretcher toward an ambulance in Tijuana.

Pfizer says its shots should be given three weeks apart.

López-Gatell said there is no cause for panic, pointing to studies that show that the vaccine may still be quite effective if the second dose is administered within four weeks.

After failing to acknowledge the threat of the coronavirus early in the pandemic and conduct the widespread testing needed to fight it, the Mexican government earned praise for its vaccination strategy.

Early on, Mexico made agreements with several companies working on vaccines, and it was the first nation in Latin America to begin vaccination, on Dec. 24.

Officials in Mexico said they have already made deals to purchase enough vaccine to inoculate the entire country.

They have signed agreements with Pfizer, China's CanSino Biologics and the British company AstraZeneca to purchase enough vaccine for 128 million people. They are also trying to line up enough of the Sputnik V vac-

cine from Russia for 12 million more.

Buying from an array of companies helps diversify risk and protect Mexico from unforeseen events such as this month's postponement of deliveries from Pfizer, according to officials in the Foreign Ministry, which helped negotiate the deals. Yet there is still no official delivery date for vaccines from most of the companies.

The Pfizer delay couldn't have come at a worse time.

Mexico has officially recorded nearly 150,000 official COVID-19 deaths — the fourth-highest death toll in the world — although officials acknowledge that the true count is much higher. Last year the country tallied 274,486 more deaths of all types than in a normal year, and health experts said the vast majority are probably attributable to the pandemic.

Epidemiologists blame the current surge on the Christmas holiday, when many families gathered in large groups despite pleas from health authorities.

They said deaths occurring

over the last week are probably the result of gatherings on Dec. 24. Another, larger wave of deaths is expected in the next five weeks, a consequence of celebrations to mark New Year's and Three Kings Day, on Jan. 6.

"It's a giant snowball," Dr. Laurie Ann Kiméñez-Fyvie, who runs the microbiology laboratory at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, told the Reforma newspaper. "What's happening right now is a perfect storm, the result of three holidays each a week apart."

For doctors in COVID-19 wards, work has become a nightmare in which every day becomes more frightening.

"Death by COVID-19 is getting more grotesque," said Franyuti Kelly, the military doctor.

During several long shifts in recent weeks at his makeshift hospital, he has been one of only a handful of doctors caring for more than 100 critically ill coronavirus patients. Without enough ventilators, he sometimes watches patients gasp for breath until they die.

## MALDONADO

From Page 3A

scratch-made hustler," she said. "We were there for the long hours at the office, the visits to potential clients; I saw how hard my parents worked. Dad's work ethic drives me every single day. He had a steadfastness about him ... I was daddy's girl, and got away with things, while Mom was strong willed—the disciplinarian."

"When we were about to get in trouble, Mom would start counting. 'If I get to three,' she'd say. You wouldn't dare let her count beyond two," Omar said. "To this day we don't know what getting to three means. Dad, on the other hand, could easily get to 20... He let us get away with things, but we never tested mom."

Margaret was the anchor of the family, and she afforded Henry the ability to take risks. Henry was about 30 years old when he "quit his supervisory job with the Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission."

"That was a big risk," Omar said. "But, he did it because he wanted to be closer to home and the ability to work for himself."

In the mid 1970s Henry and Margaret came back home after stints in Austin and Corpus Christi.

"Tío Henry saw an opportunity," said Gilbert Maldonado, a nephew to Henry.

"He was the youngest of nine children and the first Maldonado to attend and finish college, a pioneer in that regard. He was a migrant worker but never let 'being behind on his studies' hold him back," Gilbert said. "I saw him work through the night on his college papers. He inspired us and planted the seed for all of us nieces and nephews about the importance of having an education. He showed us how hard you had to work to get what you wanted. I was the first nephew to work alongside him when he came back home."

"Dad spread the notion that no matter your circumstances, you can control the outcome of your life. If you get a good education, find your passion and outwork the next guy, you can do just about anything," Yvette said. "We have successful professionals in our family. From lawyers to doctors, educators, entrepreneurs, even a judge and an architect. My dad was extremely proud of the family and what the Maldonado name has become."

"Dad and mom worked hard to make the family business into a success. My dad

believed in making a personal connection with clients. He would go door-to-door from Laredo to Raymondville to South Padre Island," Yvette said. "He wasn't pushing his business on people. He was educating the community. Empowering people with knowledge to make their businesses successful. In turn, he gained their trust, and life-long clients."

"He helped businesses start in the right way, he'd help them get their TABC license, with continuing education, and he'd counsel them so they could sustain themselves," Omar said.

It appears Henry was a natural at building relationships, and he understood how to translate that skill into a strong business, and a successful life. Since he launched his TABC certification business in 1987, Maldonado Business Services has easily certified half a million people.

"Teaching dad's TABC certification classes is where we got our start. Dad put Gilbert, Omar and me to work as certified instructors. Those classes allowed us to build our confidence speaking in front of large audiences," Yvette said.

When the community had the opportunity to participate in a memorial service for

Henry, drove of cars lined up to pay respects, in a drive-by service. Omar declares that one of his lifelong goals is to have a similar impact on the lives of others like his father did.

"I've often said, at the moment of my death I want to leave this earth having lived a life where the community will comfort my children and share with them the stories of how I lived my life. Yvette and I are still being comforted by so many wonderful stories, shared by so many friends. Dad made along his journey," Omar said.

It is clear Henry Maldonado lived a life worth living, and it is evident others benefited from his 71-year stay on earth.

*Que en paz descansen Enrique "Henry" Maldonado. Rest in peace.*

*Francisco Guajardo, chief executive officer for the Museum of South Texas History at 200 N. Clozner 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.*

## VIDEOS

From Page 3A

have placed our community at high risk are — obesity, diabetes, hypertension."

Fortunately, all these conditions are modifiable through lifestyle changes such as diet and exercise.

"These are factors that aren't just purely linked with genetics through lifestyle modification, these can actually be reversed and turned around," he said. "I think if we've ever seen a reason to make a dramatic change in

health and wellness it's now."

Romero said if Valley residents can make lifestyle changes in the time of COVID-19, those changes can help lower the incidence of such health matters as stroke, heart attack and chronic kidney disease. These maladies affect a disproportionately large number of Valley residents.

"Diet and exercise, those are two of the hallmarks of truly moving the needle on obesity, diabetes, hypertension, a lot of the modifiable risk factors for heart

disease and stroke risk," he said. "Those are going to be present long after COVID's gone. And if you look at the recommendations for managing a lot of chronic illnesses, the first thing is lifestyle modification — diet and exercise."


Thus the purpose of Romero's video series.

"I plan on releasing a video twice a month," he said. "It's going to be an ongoing series really highlighting the great opportunities for finding health and wellness in the Rio Grande Valley. It will have

interviews with local experts that are sharing insights on how to truly find meaningful health and wellness here in this beautiful region that we live in."

Romero said he'll also be talking about other health matters such as smoking cessation and managing anxiety. He also plans to post the videos on Facebook. He hopes to create an Instagram account for the series and maybe a separate website.

*whitehead@valleystar.com*



### Extended Coverage

by B.R. Whisenant

#### FALL-PRONE OLDER ADULTS OFTEN FAIL TO ADJUST TO DIMINISHED EYESIGHT

Among older adults, falls are a common problem. About one-third of those over age 65 fall once each year. Visual information helps us to coordinate our movements so that we can successfully navigate our surroundings. In fall-prone older adults, however, the ability to collect visual information is compromised, and this group is not adequately compensating for this effect.

The Journal Insight: Research and Practice in Visual Impairment and Blindness reports on an experiment comparing three groups: older adults who had fallen at least once in the past 12 months, older adults who had not fallen, and younger adults.

The participants completed a walking course that consisted of an invisible equilateral triangle. One side of the triangle was a mat with sensors that recorded the gait of the participants. Researchers also tested the subjects' ability to navigate this unmarked course. After following the course under normal conditions, the participants then attempted to walk the course again wearing safety goggles wrapped with masking tape. The tape blurred the participants' vision but still allowed light in.

Blurred vision took its toll on the performance of all three groups, but especially the fall-prone older adults. When the vision of the other two groups was reduced, they reduced their walking speed. They were compensating for their impairment by proceeding more slowly. The fall-prone group, however, did not walk more slowly. They also made more errors in returning to the starting point of the course.

Presented as a service to the community by

BERT WHISENANT  
INSURANCE

816 E. Hackberry, McAllen • 686-8323

