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Victims of COVID-19, Treviños leave behind grieving family and church

BY FRANCISCO GUAJARDO
SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

BEARING WITNESS

Graciela and Tomás Treviño were the epitome of a love story.

Cynthia Martínez, the first of Graciela and Tomás' children and the person who bore closest witness to their lives, describes their story.

“My mom and dad just showed so much love for each other,” Cynthia said. “They followed each other everywhere.”

Graciela was born in Laredo on Oct. 22, 1969 — the same year Tomás was born in Nuevo Laredo. After Tomás' family moved to Laredo, both Graciela and Tomás grew up across the

street from each other, fell madly in love as teenagers, and then loved each other until COVID-19 took them. Cynthia narrates the times her parents showed great devotion to each other.

“When my father wanted to go to Bible College, my mom was there to support him. When he built his own church, my mom was there for him,” Cynthia said. “Fifteen years ago, my mom got sick and went into a coma. The doctors felt the only way to save her was to ampu-

tate her arms and legs, and they did. She was only 45.”

Tomás was there to feed her, take her to the bathroom, and provide steadfast love and support.

“For 15 years, he never, ever left her side,” Cynthia said. “They loved each other until the end.”

Beyond the love that suffused the family, humor boosted their resiliency.

“In an endearing way, I used to call my mom my gingerbread, because she didn't have her complete arms or legs,” Cynthia said. “She always laughed with me when I called her that.”

The humor would halt, when both parents contracted the virus.

“Dad was heartbroken

when mom died,” said Cynthia. “I think my father got COVID from my mother, because she was the only person he was with before he contracted the virus.”

Tomás experienced severe symptoms.

“We had him on an oxygen machine, but then the hurricane [Hurricane Hanna] hit,” Cynthia recalls. “We lost power and the generator wasn't strong enough to keep my dad's oxygen levels high enough, and he got worse. We took him to the hospital, and that was the last time we saw him. He stayed there for a month and died on Aug. 30.”



Courtesy photo

Graciela, center, and Tomas Trevino, left, both died due to COVID-19.

See **TREVIÑOS** | 4A



David J. Phillip | The Associated Press

Above: Harris County election clerk Nora Martinez, left, helps a voter in Houston on June 29, 2020. **Below:** Chester County election workers process mail-in and absentee ballots for the 2020 general election in the United States at West Chester University in West Chester, Pennsylvania, on Nov. 4, 2020.

Man arrested on gun charges after being denied entry to Mexico

BY MARK REAGAN
STAFF WRITER

Jan. 10, according to the complaint.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers discovered a small arsenal hidden in a man's jeep after Mexican border authorities denied him entry into the country because of his paper registration, the agency said.

Federal authorities arrested Noe De Hoyos, who was born in 1987, on Wednesday. He is charged with illegally exporting 13 firearms, including AK-47s, AR-15s, shotguns, handguns and 2,537 rounds of assorted ammunition.

The alleged smuggling attempt happened Jan. 10 when De Hoyos showed up at the Pharr port of entry after being denied entry into Mexico.

CBP decided to perform an intensive secondary inspection when officers found a plastic-wrapped package tied with rope to the undercarriage of the jeep he was driving, according to a criminal complaint.

Authorities say they immediately searched De Hoyos and recovered a Taurus PT145 handgun from his front waistband.

In addition to the discovery of the guns and ammo, CBP also reported finding nine rifle and pistol magazines and other firearm accessories.

However, during this encounter, De Hoyos claimed to have medical problems and was transported to the hospital so no arrest or interview took place on

Federal authorities don't say what happened to De Hoyos after he was transported to the hospital, but do say that on Jan. 26 he turned up at the Donna Port of Entry where CBP stopped him.

Agents with HSI and the ATF showed up and interviewed De Hoyos, who admitted to crossing frequently — 100 times since January 2020 — and knowing it is illegal to transport firearms into Mexico, the complaint stated.

During the interview, federal agents said he made inconsistent statements about the Jan. 10 incident.

De Hoyos told agents he purchased the jeep at the Alamo Flea Market for \$3,000 on either Jan. 8 or 9, but he had no bill of sale or receipt, according to the complaint.

Federal agents say he then modified his story, telling them a friend suggested he buy the jeep, but he could not recall his friend's full name and took several seconds to come up with a first name.

A search of his phone revealed photos of two pistols, including one of which was the handgun found in his waistband on Jan. 10, according to the complaint.

De Hoyos is being temporarily held without bond pending detention and probable cause hearings scheduled for next week, records show.

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See **VOTING** | 4A

GOP lawmakers seek tougher voting rules

Efforts come after record turnout in 2020 election

BY ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE
AND ACACIA CORONADO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Matt Slocum | The Associated Press

AUSTIN — Republican lawmakers in statehouses across the country are moving swiftly to attack some of the voting methods that fueled the highest turnout for a presidential

election in 50 years.

Although most legislative sessions are just getting underway, the Brennan Center for Justice, a

public policy institute, has already tallied more than 100 bills in 28 states meant to restrict voting access. More than a third

of those proposals are aimed at limiting mail voting, while other bills seek to strengthen voter ID requirements and registration processes, as well as allow for more aggressive means to remove people from voter rolls.

“Unfortunately, we are seeing some politicians who want to manipulate the rules of the game so that some people can participate and some can't,” said Myrna Pérez, director of the voting rights and elections program at the Brennan Center.

See **VOTING** | 4A

Families of Texas couple killed in drug raid sue city, cops

BY JUAN A. LOZANO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON— The families of a couple killed in a 2019 drug raid by Houston police have alleged in newly filed lawsuits that the deaths of their loved ones were the tragic result of a narcotics unit that for years was rife with

corruption and no accountability and now has many of its members under indictment.

Relatives of Dennis Tuttle, 59, and his wife, Rhogena Nicholas, 58, said on Thursday that filing the federal civil rights lawsuits is the only way they will get answers from police and city officials

about how the couple was killed and will be a way to restore the reputations of their loved ones, who they say were falsely accused of being drug dealers.

“The hardest part, I think, is to my momma. She still wants to know exactly what happened. She said her daughter was no

drug dealer. She helped all her neighbors,” John Nicholas, Rhogena Nicholas' brother, said at a news conference Thursday.

At the time of the Jan. 28, 2019 raid, police had accused Tuttle and Nicholas of selling heroin from their home.

But prosecutors have since alleged one of the

officers that led the raid, Gerald Goines, lied to obtain the warrant to search the couple's home by claiming a confidential informant had bought heroin there. Goines later said there was no informant and he had bought the drugs himself, they allege. Police found small amounts of marijuana

and cocaine in the house, but no heroin.

An audit made public in July of the narcotics unit found officers made hundreds of errors in cases, lacked supervision and overpaid informants for the seizure of minuscule amounts of drugs.

See **LAWSUIT** | 4A

People desperate for COVID-19 guides seek local journalists

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Calling a hospital to see if a bed was available for a COVID-19 patient isn't part of Houston television news anchor Chauncy Glover's job description. Neither is guiding a viewer online to find a place to be vaccinated.

He's done both, and isn't alone. Listeners and readers across the country are reaching out directly to journalists for help during the coronavirus pandemic, and many are responding.

"We are now doing more than we bargained for," Glover said. "We have to be smarter on these topics. We have to know more. For so many people, it may be life or death."

It began for Glover last spring, when he came down with COVID-19 and told his story to KTRK-TV viewers. By phone, email and text, he was peppered with questions after getting back to work: What did it feel like? Should I be worried if I have this symptom? What did you do during quarantine to keep from going crazy?

One viewer described symptoms that made Glover suggest he go to

the hospital, and the news anchor followed up with calls to find space for him.

During the past month, inquiries about how to get vaccinated have become most common. Southern California Public Radio, which has an aggressive community outreach program, had 275 questions about that in a two-day period last week, said Ashley Alvarado, director of community engagement.

Listeners have also asked Alvarado's team about unemployment benefits, about whether or not they should cancel a family wedding or if it was illegal to hold a graveside service for a relative who died.

Alvarado frequently tips reporters to potential stories based on what her department hears. Similarly, questions that science and medical reporter Lisa Krieger gets are fodder for features and consumer tips published in the Mercury News of San Jose, California, and partner newspapers in the Bay Area News Group.

CC Davidson-Hiers, a reporter for the Tallahassee Democrat in Florida, has lost track of how many requests she's gotten, many from elderly readers



Chauncy Glover via AP

Chauncy Glover, news anchor at KTRK, appears in the studio in Houston on March 16, 2020.

who can't navigate online vaccination sign-ups.

It's an abrupt turnaround from last year, when her inbox was filled with vitriol from people who called her an alarmist or worthless human being trying to scare people, just because she was writing about COVID-19.

Now, she emails links and suggestions to readers who contact her. When she gets calls, she will stay

on the line and walk people through the process when they're struggling with the internet.

"I absolutely love doing it," Davidson-Hiers said. "I have to keep an eye on how sustainable it is. It's something we're all facing — the pressure of the pandemic and the stress of it all."

Alvarado has staggered the work hours of people answering calls and simi-

larly guards the mental health of colleagues who hear stories of trauma over and over again.

Several of the people Krieger speaks to are simply grateful to hear another human being, instead of speaking to machines and getting calls dropped, or directed to an alienating online experience.

Krieger has spent nights and weekends answering messages. She speaks

to church groups and her newspaper has set up online seminars. She realizes that her first responsibility is to report and write stories, but said management has supported her efforts to help readers.

"This is payback time for us," she said. "These are readers who are very loyal and they need us. The least we can do is return their calls and emails."

Glover has spent considerable time trying to convince people in Houston's Black community that the vaccines are safe. He's met with hardened skepticism, including people who disparage "Trump's vaccine." He and colleague Mayra Moreno host televised town hall meetings aimed particularly at Black and Latino residents.

Alvarado similarly tries to break down cultural barriers, and sends out a regular text message of coronavirus news to listeners who don't have Internet access.

"For me, it's rewarding," Glover said. "You work so hard to become that voice that people turn to and they trust what you're saying. To me, that's the ultimate goal of a journalist — to be trusted."

Texas bill would block imitations from using the term 'beef'

BY BOB SECHLER
AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Texas, the top cattle producer in the nation, might seem an unlikely backdrop for confusion over the meaning of words such as "meat" or "beef."

But that isn't stopping an effort in the state Legislature to officially define them — by codifying "meat," for instance, as derived solely from carcasses of cows, chickens or other livestock, with no "lab-grown, cell cultured, insect or plant-based food products" included.

The definitions, contained in a proposed law called the Texas Meat and Imitation Food Act, are needed to prevent makers of meat alternatives, such as plant-based burger patties, from duping consumers regarding the contents of their products, according to agriculture groups that are backing the plan.

The law would block the words "meat," "beef," "chicken," "pork" or any "common variation" of them from being used on packaging, even if only to claim similar textures, flavors or cooking methods, unless the official definitions are met. It wouldn't prevent the use of "burger" or other non-specific terms.

More: Texas business groups: Legislature must offer 'critical recovery measures'

"For me it is all about truth in advertising — being truthful to your consumer," said Missy Bonds, a third-generation Texas rancher and a board



Angela Weiss | AFP via Getty Images | TNS

Beyond Meat and Beyond Burger patties made from plant-based substitutes for meat products sit on a shelf for sale on Nov. 15, 2019 in New York City.

member of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association.

"We are not opposed to new development and new products," Bonds said. But "they are trying to connect our product to their product, and we want to dissociate our product from their product."

The proposed remedy — outlined in House Bill 316, by state Rep. Brad Buckley, R-Killeen — is being criticized as censorship by advocates for alternatives to conventionally produced protein.

Similar laws have been introduced in other states, with mixed success, and a number that have won approval are subject to ongoing litigation based on the contention that they violate the constitutional right to free speech guaranteed by the First Amendment.

"Label censorship laws are condescending to consumers and unconstitutional," said Scott Weathers, senior policy specialist at the Good Food Institute, a nonprofit that promotes plant-based alternatives

to animal protein, as well as development of meat produced in laboratories from cultivated animal cells.

Weathers said the use of the word "meat" and related terms on the labels of such products are appropriate because they describe functionality and intended use. They aren't meant to trick anyone, he said.

"We think it's unfortunate that some of our elected officials are spending their time on the imaginary crisis of people confusing hamburgers for veggie burgers," Weathers said.

More: Oil and gas group to Texas lawmakers: New taxes will hurt rebound

But Buckley, a veterinarian who also helps operate a small family cattle operation, said the issue isn't imaginary and is likely to grow, because more alternatives to conventionally raised meat are in development, will be brought to market and stand to perplex some consumers without clear definitions in place.

TREVIÑOS

From Page 3A

After the death of her father, Cynthia and the family were determined to keep the church their father founded open.

"Since my parents died, we've been trying to keep the church going, but we miss my parents because they made everything go," Cynthia said. "People from the church especially miss my dad's big hugs. They say, 'We don't get the big hugs like Hermano Tomás used to give.'"

Cynthia describes COVID-19 as a threat to her entire family.

"My husband, my brother, my sister, my father, my mom, my uncle, and eight other relatives have gotten the virus," Cynthia said. "We all take precautions, but when families live together, what can you do? Even when you try your best to protect yourself..."

In the midst of this family tragedy, Cynthia poignantly describes the triumph of the human spirit. Her 8-year-old daughter Zoe told her mom that she wants to "talk about mama and papa" most days.

"Zoe competes in pageants, and just yesterday at a rehearsal, the moderator asked her if she had

one wish, what would that be. And Zoe said, 'my wish is to bring my mama and papa back,'" Cynthia said.

Que en paz descansan Graciela y Tomás Treviño. 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.

VOTING

From Page 3A

The proposals are advancing not only in Texas and other traditional red states but also in such places as Arizona, Georgia and Pennsylvania that supported Donald Trump four years ago, only to flip for Joe Biden in November.

Many Republicans have said the new bills are meant to shore up public confidence after Trump and his GOP allies, without evidence, criticized the election as fraudulent. Those claims were turned away by dozens of courts and were made even as a group of election officials — including representatives of the federal government's cybersecurity agency — deemed the 2020 presidential election the "the most secure

in American history." Trump's former attorney general, William Barr, also said he saw no evidence of widespread fraud that would have changed the election results.

In last year's presidential election, nearly 70% of all ballots cast nationwide came before Election Day, with an estimated 108 million people voting through the mail, early in-person or by dropping off absentee ballots. The surge came after states expanded access to mail voting and early voting, with a few states sending absentee ballots to all registered voters in response to the coronavirus pandemic that raised safety questions about large crowds at the polls.

In Texas, the nation's largest Republican-controlled state, the 2020 presidential election was

considered a resounding success by almost any measure. Millions took advantage of early in-person voting to shatter the state's turnout record. There were no reports of widespread system meltdowns, voter disenfranchisement or fraud.

But some GOP lawmakers there are seeking new criminal offenses to deter voter fraud, even though actual fraud is exceedingly rare. Other bills would prohibit independent groups from distributing application forms for mail-in ballots and clarify who can request an application. In September, the state sued Harris County, home to Democratic-leaning Houston, to stop officials from sending mail ballot applications to the more than 2 million registered voters there.

LAWSUIT

From Page 3A

Mayor Sylvester Turner, said on Thursday the overwhelming number of Houston police officers are doing an "outstanding job." "You cannot tarnish, stain the entire force of any organization because of the acts of a few," Turner said.

Goines was indicted last year on two counts of felony murder in the deaths of the couple. Another officer, Felipe Gallegos, was indicted on Monday for murder in Tuttle's death. Goines and another officer, Steven Bryant also face federal charges after a civil rights investigation by the FBI.

In all, a dozen current and former officers tied to the narcotics unit have been indicted, with most for charges related to lying on search warrants, put-

ting false information on offense reports and lying on time sheets as part of a scheme to get overtime.

Since the raid, prosecutors have been reviewing thousands of cases handled by the Houston Police Department's narcotics division and have determined at least 150 cases should be dismissed because of Goines' involvement

During the raid, officers used a "no-knock" warrant that didn't require them to announce themselves before entering. Police say the couple's dog attacked them and they were met by gunfire from Tuttle. Four officers, including Goines, were shot, with one being paralyzed. Another officer was injured.

Michael Doyle, one of the attorneys for Rhogena Nicholas' family, said questions remain about how the couple was killed

as police have refused to release ballistics reports and other evidence about the shooting.

An independent forensic review by the families' attorneys has suggested Nicholas was fatally shot as she sat on her couch and the bullet came from an officer who fired through a wall from outside the home.

In their lawsuit, Tuttle's family raised doubts that Tuttle, whom they described as disabled and frail, ever fired on officers and if he did, it was because he believed his home "was under attack by violent criminals."

Each family filed its own federal lawsuit against the city and 13 officers. Police Chief Art Acevedo was named a defendant in the lawsuit by Nicholas' family. The lawsuits did not specify monetary damages.

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