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~J. GONZALEZ

## A family gatherer, Alicia Ortiz’s death leaves family with void

BY FRANCISCO GUAJARDO  
SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

### BEARING WITNESS

The day Alicia Ortiz died on July 16, 2020, all of a sudden the Dallas Cowboys didn't seem to matter quite so much. That's the assessment of Art Ortiz, Alicia's brother and someone who bore close witness to his big sister's life.

“Alicia used to rally us together. She'd get us to go to my parents' house on Sundays to watch the Cowboys,” Art said. “She loved the Cowboys and found them as a good way to bring all of us together.”

“This past football season was different. I went for maybe one game. It just wasn't the same without Alicia. Nobody rallied us to get there, it just wasn't the same,” Art said. Alicia's leadership with

the rank-and-file of the six Ortiz children was clear. Her brothers loved her, and they followed her: to watch the Cowboys, to come for Thanksgiving, to celebrate Christmas. Alicia led, and the family followed.

“To watch the Cowboys, she would tell me to bring drinks and chips,” Art said. “For Thanksgiving, she gave other assignments, like to bring pie. She was the leader.”

“This past Thanksgiving, we got together, and tried to keep the spirit, and we kind of did. But Christmas was different, a little less full, because



Courtesy photo

Alicia Ortiz, right, died due to COVID-19 at the age of 57 in 2020.

Alicia wasn't there,” Art said. “She was the glue—selfless, generous, and the personality that brought us together.”

“She was born through a midwife in Mercedes, Texas, on March 6, 1963,” Art said.

She was 57 years old when COVID-19 took her. It's been a hard time for the family.

“So much loss,” Art said. “We lost Alicia, but we also lost my uncle to COVID, and we also lost his son.”

The losses have multiplied in the most unforgiving way. In Alicia's case, the virus took a woman unequivocally committed to family.

“When my mom was diagnosed with lupus, Alicia looked after her every single day. Years later Alicia took Mom to dialysis for about two or three years, the last years of my mom's life,” Art said.

“Alicia was always there,” he said. “She was

there for us too, for me and for the younger kids. She helped my parents raise the younger kids.”

“Maybe the biggest loss is that she was always there to listen,” Art said. “If you needed someone to talk to, you could always count on Alicia to listen.”

Alicia leaves two daughters and four grandchildren, but she also left a generous spirit that was clearly impactful.

“My sister was the most giving person. She sacrificed for others, that's the memory and impact she leaves behind,” Art said.

The perpetual giver, Alicia's last employment was as a home health care provider.

“She took care of my uncle,” said Art, mournfully reflecting on the

consistency of Alicia's selflessness.

There is no consolation here, because Art describes a palpable void.

“It's emotional. It's been more than half a year, but we're still dealing with her loss. We're not over it,” Art said.

*Que en paz descanse Alicia Ortiz. 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.*

# For Beto and Billy



Photos by Joel Martinez | [jmartinez@themonitor.com](mailto:jmartinez@themonitor.com)

Beto Carr walks past a mural of himself as Beto's Boxing Club celebrates him and Billy Schwarz with speeches and a drive-by parade on Saturday in Mercedes.

## Mercedes legends celebrated with mural, drive-by parade

BY EMILY D'GYVES  
STAFF WRITER

MERCEDES — Beto's Boxing Club had an enormous white wall.

Had. Stanley Carr, 65, the son of Mercedes legend Heriberto “Beto” Carr, saw beauty in that wall, pondering what he could do with the untouched canvas.

One day, Stanley was studying the wall when Rebecca Schwarz Ruiz, 53, the landlord of the building where the boxing club operates, walked up behind him. When she asked him what he was doing, Stanley told her, “Oh, nothing. Just thinking.”

“Well, it'd be nice if we put your dad and my dad up there,” Rebecca said in response.

What was just an idea became a reality for Stanley and Rebecca: two portraits of their fathers, conjoined by the Beto's Boxing Club logo in the middle, painted across the previously empty canvas.

On Saturday, an inaugural drive-by parade was held for the work, dubbed the



Rebecca Schwarz Ruiz stands next to a mural of her father Billy Schwarz as Beto's Boxing Club celebrates community leaders Beto Carr and her father Billy in Mercedes on Saturday.

Beto Carr and Billy Schwarz Wall of Fame. Numerous officials were in attendance such as Mercedes Mayor Oscar Montoya, former Mayor Henry Hinojosa, South Texas Amateur Boxing Association President Tom Lindsey, as well as the city's police and fire departments.

The man of the hour, 88-year-old Beto Carr was sitting on a school desk with a pair of bright red boxing gloves and his trophy for being the first inductee to the

Rio Grande Valley Boxing Hall of Fame, surrounded by a crowd who loves him.

### BETO

If you wanted to be a boxer, a coach or an official in South Texas, you definitely met Beto Carr, who was an area coordinator. Due to the pandemic, however, Stanley said his father had to retire last year — a painful decision for Beto.

“He is not happy about it, but he understands that

that's what needs to be done,” Stanley explained.

To understand Beto's difficult decision, one needs to rewind to 1977 — the beginning of his journey in amateur boxing. Also a Korean War veteran with two Purple Heart awards for his service, Stanley said that boxing had a big impact on Beto.

“With what he's gone through, that's what helps keep him sane,” the son said.

In addition to owning Beto's Boxing Club since 1977, Beto has done it all: coached boxing, trained future champions (such as former IBA Light Welterweight Champion Tomas Barrientes), was a cutman, a cornerman and a level three official — the highest level in amateur boxing — to name a few.

“He's been recognized with all sorts of awards,” Stanley said. “He's received just about every award you can imagine as far as amateur boxing is concerned.”

Even in recent times, Beto continues to be recognized. In 2019, he was the first to be

## South Texas College kicks off president search

BY MATT WILSON  
STAFF WRITER

McALLEN — The South Texas College board of trustees approved the engagement of an organization to assist with the college's search for a new president during a Jan. 26 meeting.

For a price of \$45,000, the Association of Community College Trustees will help the college find a permanent replacement for founding President Shirley Reed, who officially retired at the beginning of January.

Among ACCT's responsibilities are candidate recruitment, processing of candidate applications, reference reports on up to three final candidates, technical assistance and preparation of candidate review materials.

The proposal presented to

the board notes that ACCT has over 50 years of experience and has successfully completed over 500 searches for chief executive officers at community colleges across the nation.

“We appreciate the support of the board moving this item forward,” Board President Rose Benavidez said. “I mentioned earlier, we are finalizing times and dates that I believe we will do here this week in order to meet with the group. Then the question and items that we have for this item to move forward, we will be able to do so. We're looking forward to everyone's participation and thank you for finally moving this item forward.”

The proposal also includes a timeline for the search.

See **PRESIDENT** | 4A

## Suspect in 2015 Mission double homicide set for arraignment

BY MARK REAGAN  
STAFF WRITER

A 42-year-old man accused of participating in a drug rip that resulted in a double homicide more than six years ago is scheduled to be arraigned Monday on an indictment charging him with capital murder of multiple persons.

Police arrested Alberto Garcia last October for his alleged role in the Dec. 26, 2015, shooting deaths of 24-year-old Rodriguez Villanueva Alvarez and 43-year-old Juan Camorlinga Torres.

Garcia, along with 55-year-old Ramon Aguilar Jr., 31-year-old Javier Mendez Rodriguez, Torres and then-29-year-old Guillermo Peña are accused of attempting to

steal more than 400 pounds of marijuana a day after Christmas from a residence in the 6100 block of Dario Street in rural Mission.

However, a confrontation ensued and the suspects exchanged gunfire with Alvarez, the owner of the home and target of the robbery, resulting in Alvarez and Torres' deaths.

Hidalgo County sheriff's deputies found the man dead behind a small trailer at the back of the property at around 2:58 p.m. that day, according to a probable cause affidavit.

“Sheriff Investigators reviewed surveillance footage which showed armed men to include Juan Camorlinga Torres arrive at the residence in a silver Ford Ranger and a secondary vehicle. Armed men entered the property and chased after the homeowner

See **ARRAIGNMENT** | 4A



Garcia

See **LEGENDS** | 4A

# Weslaco banker appointed to state appraiser board

STAFF REPORT

Gov. Greg Abbott has appointed another Rio Grande Valley resident to the Texas Appraiser Licensing and Certification Board.

On Feb. 1, the governor announced via a news release that Paola Escalante-Castillo of Weslaco, the vice president of Frost Bank, will serve on the board with her term set to expire Jan. 31, 2027.

Escalante-Castillo is also a board member of the United Way of South Texas, a red coat ambassador of the Weslaco Area Chamber of Commerce and the treasurer of the Weslaco Lions Club.

She received her Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Texas-Pan American (now UTRGV) and completed the banking program from Texas Tech University.

Abbott also reappointed two other members of the board as well.

Chance Bolton of Bee Cave and Martha Gayle Reid Lynch of El Paso share the same term limits as Castillo.

Bolton is a United States Navy veteran and is the managing partner of Bolton Real Estates Consultants Ltd., a real estate broker and a licensed Texas real estate appraiser.

He is also a former board member of the Lake Travis Education Foundation and former member of the Real Estate Council of Austin.

Bolton received his education from the University of Houston.

Lynch is the owner of Gayle Reid Appraisal Services Inc. and — similarly to Bolton — is a licensed Texas real estate appraiser and real estate broker.

She is also a designated member of the Appraisal Institute and Foundation Appraisers Coalition of Texas.

Lynch received her education in the University of Texas at El Paso.

## PRESIDENT

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Although Benavidez noted the timeline is subject to change and will likely be finalized sometime in February, the preliminary timeline indicates that STC's new president could start around July 1.

The preliminary timeline suggests ACCT will begin holding virtual open forums

with the community to solicit feedback on the position. Recruitment is slated to start at the end of this month, ACCT is hoping to have applications in by the end of March and the board could be discussing finalists in March.

The search began on Jan. 26.

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## ARRAIGNMENT

From Page 3A

and the other victim's at location while pointing handguns in their direction," the affidavit states.

Authorities allege Garcia owned the Ford Ranger, was armed and that he employed Torres.

Investigators say they recovered guns, bundles of marijuana, cash and video surveillance from the scene in rural Mission.

Aguilar was the first suspect arrested after the shooting. He pleaded guilty to murder in 2017 and is serving a 28-year prison sentence.

He's eligible for parole in 2030 and his maximum sen-

tence leaves him in jail until 2044.

Rodriguez was a fugitive for nearly four years.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection arrested him at the Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge in March 2019 after biometric information alerted to an arrest warrant.

He is also charged with capital murder of multiple persons and remains jailed on a \$2 million bond. He is scheduled for a jury trial in June and has pleaded not guilty.

Garcia also remains jailed on a \$2 million bond.

Peña is still a fugitive.

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# Terry Crews to serve as next UTRGV distinguished speaker

STAFF REPORT

Actor, activist, best-selling author and former athlete Terry Crews will headline the Distinguished Speaker Series at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley on Monday.

According to a news release from the university, the virtual event, hosted

by UTRGV Student Activities, will start at 7:30 p.m. and feature Crews, who is best known for his roles in film and television, including The Expendables films.

Director for Student Activities Cindy Mata said that

the committee that helps select the names for the series has had Crews on the list for a few years and seized the opportunity to bring him to UTRGV through a virtual event, the release read.

"We are excited



Crews

to hear what he has to say and how his upbringing and experiences have helped him get to where he is today," Mata wrote.

Mata said the committee is already looking into speakers for the next season of DSS, the release says, and she hinted there are some big names on the list.

# Next stop Mars: 3 spacecraft arriving in quick succession

BY MARCIA DUNN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — After hurtling hundreds of millions of miles through space since last summer, three robotic explorers are ready to hit the brakes at Mars.

The stakes — and anxiety — are sky high.

The United Arab Emirates' orbiter reaches Mars on Tuesday, followed less than 24 hours later by China's orbiter-rover combo. NASA's rover, the cosmic caboose, will arrive on the scene a week later, on Feb. 18, to collect rocks for return to Earth — a key step in determining whether life ever existed at Mars.

Both the UAE and China are newcomers at Mars, where more than half of Earth's emissaries have failed. China's first Mars mission, a joint effort with Russia in 2011, never made it past Earth's orbit.

"We are quite excited as engineers and scientists, at the same time quite stressed and happy, worried, scared," said Omran Sharaf, project manager for the UAE.

All three spacecraft rocketed away within days of one another last July, during an Earth-to-Mars launch window that occurs only every two years. That's why their arrivals are also close together.

Called Amal, or Hope in Arabic, the Gulf nation's spacecraft is seeking an especially high orbit — 13,500 miles high (22,000 kilometers) by 44,000 kilometers — all the better to monitor the Martian weather.

China's duo — called Tianwen-1, or "Quest for Heavenly Truth" — will remain paired in orbit until May, when the rover separates to descend to the dusty, ruddy surface. If all goes well, it will be only the second country to land successfully on the red planet.

The U.S. rover Perseverance, by contrast, will dive in straight away for a harrowing sky-crane touchdown similar



Jon Gambrell | The Associated Press

Men watch the launch of the "Amal" or "Hope" space probe at the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Center in Dubai, United Arab Emirates on July 20, 2020.

to the Curiosity rover's grand Martian entrance in 2012. The odds are in NASA's favor: It's nailed eight of its nine attempted Mars landings.

Despite their differences — the 1-ton Perseverance is larger and more elaborate than the Tianwen-1 rover — both will prow for signs of ancient microscopic life.

Perseverance's \$3 billion mission is the first leg in a U.S.-European effort to bring Mars samples to Earth in the next decade.

"To say we're pumped about it, well that would be a huge understatement," said Lori Glaze, NASA's planetary science director.

Perseverance is aiming for an ancient river delta that seems a logical spot for once harboring life. This landing zone in Jezero Crater is so treacherous that NASA nixed it for Curiosity, but so tantalizing that scientists are keen to get hold of its rocks.

"When the scientists take a look at a site like Jezero Crater, they see the promise, right?" said Al Chen, who's in charge of the entry, descent and landing team at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. "When I look at Jezero, I see danger.

There's danger everywhere."

Steep cliffs, deep pits and fields of rocks could cripple or doom Perseverance, following its seven-minute atmospheric plunge. With an 11 1/2-minute communication lag each way, the rover will be on its own, unable to rely on flight controllers. Amal and Tianwen-1 will also need to operate autonomously while maneuvering into orbit.

Until Perseverance, NASA sought out flat, boring terrain on which to land — "one giant parking lot," Chen said. That's what China's Tianwen-1 rover will be shooting for in Mars' Utopia Planitia.

NASA is upping its game thanks to new navigation technology designed to guide the rover to a safe spot. The spacecraft also has a slew of cameras and microphones to capture the sights and sounds of descent and landing, a Martian first.

Faster than previous Mars vehicles but still moving at a glacial pace, the six-wheeled Perseverance will drive across Jezero, collecting core samples of the most enticing rocks and gravel. The rover will set the samples aside for retrieval by a fetch rover

launching in 2026.

Under an elaborate plan still being worked out by NASA and the European Space Agency, the geologic treasure would arrive on Earth in the early 2030s. Scientists contend it's the only way to ascertain whether life flourished on a wet, watery Mars 3 billion to 4 billion years ago.

NASA's science mission chief, Thomas Zurbuchen, considers it "one of the hardest things ever done by humanity and certainly in space science."

The U.S. is still the only country to successfully land on Mars, beginning with the 1976 Vikings. Two spacecraft are still active on the surface: Curiosity and InSight.

Smashed Russian and European spacecraft litter the Martian landscape, meanwhile, along with NASA's failed Mars Polar Lander from 1999.

Getting into orbit around Mars is less complicated, but still no easy matter, with about a dozen spacecraft falling short. Mars fly-bys were the rage in the 1960s and most failed; NASA's Mariner 4 was the first to succeed in 1965.

## LEGENDS

From Page 3A

inducted in the RGV Boxing Hall of Fame.

"It wasn't a hard choice to pick who would be the first person inducted into this great hall of fame, I mean, we've got many, many champions," Lindsey said. "All roads lead to Beto Carr. All roads."

Yet, recognition aside, Stanley said the important part for his father was guiding the boxers (children) in the right direction and making sure they'd stay out of trouble.

"He's my pride and joy, he's my hero," Stanley said. "I believe that this is the least I could do for him."

### BILLY

Whereas Beto is well-known, Billy Schwarz is more under the radar — literally.

Since he was a pilot, Billy would fly under the radar so he could take necessities, such as food and clothes, to poor people in Mexico, according to Stanley.

"There was a lot of things that my dad did that were not really exactly quite legal, but he didn't give a damn,"

Rebecca said.

Because her father and his brothers "were all over the place," Rebecca referred to the radar story as a legend of things he may have done. "Who knows," she said.

Born in Harlingen and raised in Mexico, Billy went on to become a minister, where he touched many people's lives, according to his daughter.

"He lived a life that only some people dream about living," Rebecca said, adding that her father was an extraordinary person.

When Beto's Boxing Club moved to the building they're currently at, Billy was the owner at the time. Had it not been for his kindness, Stanley said he and his father would've had a more difficult time.

"Whether it's next month or next year or five years from now, when your dad retires, you go ahead and take over," Billy told Stanley during an exchange at a time where his father's retirement was up in the air. "It doesn't matter if you have money or not. We're not gonna worry about that."

### THE EVENT

Festivities kicked off with

an escort lead by the Mercedes Fire Department, followed by attendees in their vehicles honking and cheering for Beto as they drove by. As a precaution due to COVID-19, attendees were asked to park in a parking lot across the street and watch at a safe distance.

The speeches of the special guests celebrated the lives of Beto Carr and Billy Schwarz, from the mayor reminiscing of attending Beto's gym to Rebecca celebrating her father's life.

"The mural talks about two men who did for their community and did for their kids," Montoya said, adding that both of the men's children — Stanley and Rebecca — have followed in their footsteps of giving.

Montoya also told a story of Billy in his deathbed, telling Rebecca that the gym was important because of the children. He revealed that Rebecca allowed Stanley to continue operating the gym without charging rent during the pandemic, which as a result, allowed Stanley to continue serving the children of Mercedes.

"It tells you about their parents and what they instilled

in them," Montoya said.

Montoya's word couldn't be any more truthful, because the event wasn't just to celebrate the lives of Beto and Billy.

Gonzalez, who put in about 50 hours of work into the mural, was also recognized not just for Beto's Boxing Club's mural, but for his work throughout the Valley. He has created murals of prominent figures and local Valley legends across the region.

"I think this is the first recognition I've ever had," Gonzalez said after he was presented with the plaque, which filled him with emotion. "I give everything to it, just as they did for the community."

After the event, attendees were allowed to meet Beto and take photos with him, backdropped by the mural.

As for Billy, Rebecca said he would have never wanted to be on the side of a building.

"That was not him, but he's just gonna have to deal with it," Gonzalez said during her speech, which was met with laughter from the crowd.

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