

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 for round-the-clock Coronavirus updates. Stay safe!"

~J. GONZALEZ

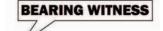
Father's death is family's fifth loss to CO

BY FRANCISCO GUAJARDO SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Jessica Prieto's father, Perfecto Salas, was her fifth family member to die of COVID-19, when he simply couldn't fight it anymore, and succumbed to the disease at DHR Health in Edinburg just a couple of weeks ago, on Jan. 20.

"Both my father and my mother got the virus from my brother Joey, who died Dec. 29. My brother got the virus from the place where he got dialysis. He had underlying conditions, and the virus just wore him down. He was 48," said Jessica, who bore close witness to both her brother and father.

"My mom was asymptom-



atic, but I think because she was always active, she wasn't really affected. But my dad had been slowing down, and he just wasn't strong enough to fight it," she said.

The virus had affected the rest of the family - both physically and emotionally.

We let our guard down, to be honest with you, when Joey died," Jessica said. "We spent time with my parents trying to console them. Just trying to be there for them."

Jessica, her husband and children contracted the virus,

"It really hit me hard, but I



Perfecto Salas

couldn't go to the hospital," Jessica said. "I had to take care of everybody."

The virus killing Perfecto was a historical injustice. Since he was born on April 18, 1941, Perfecto fought the good fight, and survived at every turn. When the city of McAllen

pressured families that occupied lands where the future McAllen International Airport and the expressway would be built on the southern edges of today's Bicentennial Blvd, the Salas family was forced to move. They did, just to the west of 23rd Street. sometime in the late 1950s or early 1960s. That's how Jessica recalls her father telling the story.

"The Salas, along with the Herreras, the Rodriguez, the Sotelos and a couple of other families moved to a colonia they called La McAllen," Jessica said. "In La McAllen, my dad built his house sometime in 1967. I know that because we have a picture of when Beulah hit, and my dad and the unfinished house were flooded."

Perfecto was the third child of 12 that grew up as migrants working in Idaho, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Texas Panhandle, Arizona, several farms across the Rio Grande Valley and other states.

"I'm sure I'm forgetting some states, but he used to tell us stories of how they worked as migrants," Jessica

After his migrant days, Perfecto learned to work with glass and became a skilled glazier that Jessica describes as part artisan and part artist.

"He built so many beautiful things of glass in his house and for other people," she said. "He was so good with his hands. His hands told so many stories — of hard work, of commitment, of so much.'

Aside from hard work, Perfecto was known to share a joke or two.

"And he was so funny. Oh my God, my dad's laughter was contagious. He could make everybody laugh," she said.

Jessica recalls her father telling his brother, "Chico, ojala que me muera yo primero porque no voy a poder cargar tu caja (Chico, I hope I die first, because I won't be able to carry your coffin).'

"He was hilarious, and he was a hard worker, and he worked well into his 70s,"

See SALAS | 4A



A section of the U.S.-Mexico border wall circles the outer edge of a farmer's field on Dec. 8, 2020, outside the Sabal Palm

Injured migrants say Border Patrol sent them back to Mexico after they fell off Trump's wall

BY ALFREDO CORCHADO THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

PALOMAS, Mexico - To escape the lingering, devastating effects of two hurricanes and the reach of organized crime, Pedro Gomez fled Guatemala in January and headed north, looking for

Thousands of miles south, Jhon Jairo Ushca Alcoser, too, left his country, Ecuador, fleeing political unrest and the economic fallout of a global pandemic that's ravaged his nation.

For both men, it seemed as if nothing would stand in the way of their cherished dream - certainly not deserts, rivers, unscrupulous smugglers, or the infamous wall they had heard so much about. But then that same wall nearly crippled them. And they say the migra — the U.S. Border Patrol — then "dumped us in Mexico like garbage, a piece of trash," said Pedro Gomez, 37. They say agents who discovered them injured sent them back across the border rather than providing them medical care on American

"When I fell off the wall, my dream crashed too," said Ushca Alcoser, 25, who this week shared his story from a bunk bed a few feet away

from Gomez, inside a migrant shelter in this desolate border town across from Columbus, New Mexico. Ushca Alcoser said his complaints to agents of his pain "fell on deaf ears."

The men's perilous journey underscores the rising desperation among immigrants in trying to cross into the United States, immigrant rights advocates say, and raises questions about the protocols used by the Border Patrol to treat injured migrants and the overall effectiveness of the border wall.

After being asked about the men's cases and how the Border Patrol handles injured migrants, the agency released a statement attributed to El Paso Sector Border Patrol Chief Gloria Chavez that read, in part: "We routinely encounter injured people on the border, most of which are individuals that have entered the country illegally. When it is apparent that someone is hurt we will administer first aid and request assistance as needed."

The statement said that the response "may include a Border Patrol agent trained and certified as an EMT; or possibly an ambulance service depending on the severity and complexity of the injury" and, if necessary, an

agent accompanying and monitoring "the progress at the medical facility until they are cleared and released for processing.'

It's not clear why these injured migrants were deported to Mexico, even after both said they told agents they couldn't walk.

"I couldn't even get up, so I crawled inside the migra vehicle," said Gomez, after falling off the wall in late January. At one point, he says he was told he was going to be taken to a U.S. hospital, but instead was dropped off at the border crossing nearly 90 miles from where he fell off the wall near El Paso. His ankles are broken ankles and he cannot walk.

The statement said that the response "may include a Border Patrol agent trained and certified as an EMT; or possibly an ambulance service depending on the severity and complexity of the injury" and, if necessary, an agent accompanying and monitoring "the progress at the medical facility until they are cleared and released for processing."

It's not clear why these injured migrants were deported to Mexico, even after both said they told agents they couldn't walk.

"I couldn't even get up, so I

crawled inside the migra vehicle," said Gomez, after falling off the wall in late January. At one point, he says he was told he was going to be taken to a U.S. hospital, but instead was dropped off at the border crossing nearly 90 miles from where he fell off the wall near El Paso. His ankles are broken and he

cannot walk. Ushca Alcoser said he told Border Patrol agents he couldn't move and was "screaming in excruciating pain" after he fell backwards off of a 30-foot section of the wall newly installed during the Trump administration as Border Patrol agents stood in front of him in early February.

But "they said 'stand up, stand up.' I don't know where I found the strength." He says he was sent back to Mexico, dragging his feet as another migrant held him up. X-rays later revealed broken tendons and a fractured back and pelvis, Sosa said.

The Border Patrol said "records indicate that neither individual you mention presented illness or injury during their brief encounters with our agents." The statement added that agents

"perform their jobs with the See BORDER PATROL | 4A



John Clanton | Tulsa World

Snow covered city streets including at 61st and Sheridan in Tulsa $\,$ as a winter storm moves in to northeast Oklahoma on Sunday.

Wintry weather blanketing US to make rare dip to Gulf Coast

BY JAMIE STENGLE

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS — Wintry weather was forecast for much of the U.S. on Sunday, with freezing temperatures expected to dip as snow falls as far south as Texas' Gulf Coast.

"Typically, we just don't have quite this much cold air in place that far south," said Marc Chenard, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center.

The storm has prompted officials in Houston, where temperatures were in the 70s (20s Celsius) earlier this week, to advise residents to prepare for power outages and hazardous roads that could be similar to those experienced in the wake of a Category 5 hurricane. Temperatures

See WEATHER | 4A

Father, son, convicted in same cocaine case

BY LORENZO ZAZUETA-CASTRO

STAFF WRITER

A Mission man was sentenced early last week for his role in a scheme to transport cocaine to Houston, records

Jorge Luis Perez-Cortez was sentenced to a more than sixyear prison sentence related to a May 2020 arrest in Edinburg, according to the complaint against the man.

Perez-Cortez, 65, who did not have legal status to remain in the country, was found with more than 2 kilos of cocaine on May 22, 2020, in his possession. On that day, Perez-Cortez

and his son picked up 2 kilograms of cocaine and traveled to a McDonald's in Elsa. There the two men met with a third person, and left together to a residence in Edcouch.

Eventually, the men returned to the parking lot from where they had departed.

During this meet, federal agents approached the two

"Agents maintained con-

stant visual surveillance of all three individuals and made contact with the third (person) in the Ford Escape, recovering two packages wrapped in black tape, containing 2.23 kilograms of (cocaine)," the document stated.

Perez-Cortez admitted he was the one responsible for coordinating the drug transaction, while his son was just his means of transportation and intended for the cocaine to be delivered to Houston.

According to court documents, federal agents had been watching Perez-Cortez as part of an investigation into drug trafficking. The investigation revealed several incriminating messages on Perez-Cortez's cellphone linking him to a drug trafficking ring.

During the sentencing hearing, the court admonished Perez-Cortez for returning to the country soon after his most recent deportation, and for involving his son, Jorge de Jesus Perez, in cocaine trafficking.

See COCAINE CASE | 4A

Observing city's Black history, Brownsville educator shares Mittie Pullam's legacy

BY NUBIA REYNA STAFF WRITER

Not many people in Brownsville know who Mittie Pullam was and how important her legacy is.

"It's important that the legacy of Mittie Pullam never be forgotten," Hugh Emerson, a local history teacher, said.

"Not many people know who Mittie Pullam is, I found out about her from a former banker. When I was elected to the Brownsville Independent School District, his question was, 'when are you going to name a school after Mittie Pullam?' and I said 'Who is Mittie Pullam?'

"I didn't know who Mittie Pullam was, I didn't know that there was a segregated school and when he told me I was very sad because that's not the Brownsville



Miguel RobeRts |

The Brownsville Herald Hugh Emerson, a history teacher at Brownsville Early College High School, holds a photograph taken during a groundbreaking ceremony for Mittie A. Pullam Elementary in 2009, which shows Emerson shaking hands with Pullam herself, who was honored and recognized as the first Black Brownsville Independent School District educator and principal.

that I know, that's not the Brownsville that I grew up in, that's not the Brownsville that's all inclusive and loves everybody."

In 1947, Pullam moved to Brownsville and helped start the first school for Black children. The school was named Frederick Douglass Elementary School and was located on East Fronton Street, where she was the sole teacher and principal. She taught grades first through sixth, and the caliber of education was considered exceptional, according to records of the time period, easily on par with the Brownsville Independent School District's white schools, her official website reads.

Black families living in Brownsville that came to work on the railroad construction and at the Port of Brownsville, were not allowed to enroll their children at the white Brownsville schools. This was years before the Supreme Court's ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education.

"The segregated school, unfortunately, started after World War II in 1947 and closed well after the United States Supreme Court Case Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954. They closed somewhere around 1960," Emerson said.

"It is very important for the people of Brownsville never to forget the legacy that Ms. Pullam left for her students and for the community at large. She was very, very highly respected by several members of the community."

Pullam's school was a one-room school house that was subsidized by the Black community, even though it was a public school. BISD was eventually desegregated in the 1960s. Segregation lasted several years after the landmark Supreme Court decision due to Jim Crow laws in Texas. The Frederick Douglass Elementary's Black students were incorporated into Skinner Elementary School, and Mrs. Pullam was hired at Skinner as well, where she is remembered as one of the school's most extraordinary teachers, the official website

"She was everything in that school," Emerson said. "She was the sole teacher, the principal, she was everything to that school. So it's only fitting that she would be recognized."

Emerson, more community members, started working diligently back in 2000 to name a school after Pullam. This became a reality in 2009 when a groundbreaking ceremony for a new elementary school took place. The school was named "Mittie Pullam Elementary" and at 97 years old, Pullam herself attended.

"There were some new schools that were available, and I was approached by Brenda Wilburn, she was a counselor at Rivera High School and we decided that we would form a committee and the committee included the reverend of the St. James Missionary Baptist Church, which is largely an African-American congregation," he said. "We got several members of the community, several of her former students and we worked diligently.'

> nreyna@ brownsvilleherald.com

Missing Virginia girl found, Texas man in custody

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MARTINSVILLE, Va. — A Texas man has been taken into custody after the disappearance of a 12-yearold Virginia girl, authorities

Kaleb Christopher Merritt, 21, was captured by police in Henderson, North Carolina, after a manhunt that began Friday, according to authorities in Virginia. The girl was found with him, unharmed.

The girl was reported missing from her home

in Bassett, Virginia on Friday afternoon. Police said she and Merritt connected in December on Instagram and communicated through social media until Merritt traveled to Virginia earlier this month to meet

Merritt set up a camp in a wooded area behind the girl's home and met with her on several occasions, investigators said. The two communicated via a messaging app before Merritt coerced her into leaving her home with him, police said.

SALAS

From Page 3A

Jessica said. "He used to say, 'no puedes parar de trabajar porque los biles no paran'" (you can't stop working because the bills won't stop coming).

Perfecto's son, Luke Martinez-Salas, also bore close witness to his father.

"I got my work ethic from him," Luke said. "We never stop.'

According to Luke, there was a time when Perfecto did stop. In an act of love, Luke says that his father resisted meeting Luke's newborn son Ollie, who is now 7 months old.

"He was too afraid," Luke id "He kept saying it's over, I'll hold him.

Regrettably, COVID took hold of Perfecto before he could meet and hold Ollie.

"I don't know how to process this. It's so much loss," Jessica said.

Que en paz descanse Perfecto Salas. Rest in peace.

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

WEATHER

From Page 3A

were expected to drop to below freezing there by Sunday night.

He said significant ice and up to 12 inches (30 centimeters) of snow were expected across parts of the southern Plains on Sunday and into Monday, with the most snowfall expected near the Oklahoma-Texas border.

Winter weather conditions are affecting large portions of the U.S., but it is rare for them to extend so far south, Chenard said.

The Dallas area had a covering of snow by Sunday morning, with flakes still falling, and as much as 6 inches (15 centimeters) was forecast.

With the wintry conditions falling on Valentine's Day, florists stayed busy even as the snow fell.

In Fort Worth, where it was already icy and snowy, Gordon Boswell Flowers' general manager said delivery drivers were trying to wrap up before conditions got worse later Sunday afternoon.

"It is icy and snowing and they're calling for more snow," Cheri Kirkman said.

Despite the weather, she said they still had some people coming in to pick up gifts. "We've got plenty all made up, ready to go," Kirkman

Chenard said sleet and freezing rain could hit further

"We're looking at potentially over a quarter inch of freezing rain, and that will cause significant impact," Chenard said. "We may even see some freezing rain get as far as New Orleans by early Monday."

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who issued a disaster declaration for all of the state's 254 counties, warned on Saturday: "All of Texas is facing an extremely dangerous winter storm."

Abbott, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt and Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson have each activated National Guard units to assist state agencies, such as rescuing stranded

The weather was affecting operations at airports across the area, with more than 700 flights canceled at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, and at Dallas Love Field most of the nearly 200 flights for Southwest Airlines, the airport's main carrier, were canceled.

Airlines said American about 345 of their flights were canceled at DFW Airport, its hub, on Sunday, The airline said the storm was also affecting their flights across the region, with operations reduced and canceled at airports across Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

Officials were discouraging travel in the wintry conditions. By early Sunday afternoon, the Texas Highway Patrol had reported several multi-car pileups in West Texas, including one that involved 25 vehicles and shut down a portion of Interstate 20 westbound.

The National Weather Service said Sunday that the forecast through early Tuesday calls for 8 to 12 inches (20 to 30 centimeters) of snow in central Oklahoma, and 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) in an area extending from eastern Texas to the Ohio Valley in the Northeast.

In Memphis, Tennessee, snow had started falling, and while main roads were still passable, lines were forming at grocery stores as people rushed to stock up.

Parts of Kentucky and West Virginia still recovering from an ice storm last week are expected to get up to a quarterinch (0.6 centimeters) of ice or up to 8 inches (20 centimeters) of snow by Tuesday. About 19,000 customers remained without electricity in southern West Virginia and about 9,000 in eastern Kentucky on Sunday from the storm that moved through on Wednesday and Thursday.

Utilities warned of the likelihood for additional power outages due to falling tree limbs. Hundreds of utility crews and contractors were traveling Sunday to be in place if additional outages

In Texas, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which manages the flow of electric power in the state, was asking customers to reduce electricity use as much as possible through Tuesday, including closing shades to reduce the amount of heat lost through windows and avoiding the use of large appliances.

"We are experiencing record-breaking electric demand due to the extreme cold temperatures that have gripped Texas," said ERCOT President and CEO Bill Magness. "At the same time, we are dealing with higher-thannormal generation outages due to frozen wind turbines and limited natural gas supplies available to generating units."

Meanwhile, in the Pacific Northwest, tens of thousands of people were without power after a winter storm blanketed the region with ice and snow and made travel treacherous.

COCAINE CASE

Jorge de Jesus Perez, 31, also of Mission, was convicted in connection with the scheme and previously sentenced to 24 months, to be immediately followed by three years of supervised release, court records show. He admitted to driving his father to their residence where the cocaine was located and

then driving the third person's car back to the meet-

THistory.org.

up location. The investigation revealed several incriminating messages on Perez-Cortez's cell phone linking him to a drug

trafficking ring. Perez-Cortez will likely be deported upon completion of his prison term.

lzazueta@

BORDER PATROL From Page 3A

utmost professionalism and and dignity towards the many people that are encountered daily" and encouraged anyone who "believe they have been mistreated" to file a complaint.

Separately, a Border Patrol spokesman said the agency does not track injuries related to the wall.

Jumping over barriers isn't new, but dumping injured migrants back to Mexico is a "new low. It's called negligence," said Pastor Rosalio Sosa, who runs the Red de Albergues Para Migrantes, or RAM, a network of migrant shelters, including the one here in Palomas where the men were interviewed. This shelter - Tierra de Oro or Land of Gold - is about two hours west of El Paso.

Sosa says since his shelter opened in Palomas nearly a year ago, they have seen about seven injuries per week, both minor and severe, from migrants hurt along the stretch of land from Arizona to New Mexico where it meets West Texas. He said he has documented the cases and pleads with Border Patrol agents to be "more responsible, more humane, because many more are coming.'

This corner of New Mexico, Chihuahua and Texas is known by some migrants as the "Devil's Triangle" because of the injuries and deaths suffered when people try to cross the 30-foot bollard wall.

This corner of New Mexico, Chihuahua and Texas is known by some migrants as the "Devil's Triangle" because of the injuries and deaths suffered when people try to cross the 30-foot bollard wall. (Alfredo Corchado / The Dallas Morning News)

Sosa and others are bracdisplay a high level of respect the number of migrants in the coming days and weeks in this region as winter ebbs and the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic worsen across Latin America, a region already plagued by corruption and organized crime. Plus, Sosa said, there's renewed hope the new Biden administration will treat migrants more humanely, "giv-

ing rise to hope." On Thursday, President Joe Biden informed Congress that he has terminated the national emergency over the U.S.-Mexico border that former President Trump first declared in Feb. 2019, declaring "no more American taxpayer dollars be diverted to construct a border wall.'

That and a loosening of many of Trump's widely criticized draconic immigration policies are expected to lead to an increase in the number of migrants headed north for refuge or work. So many are expected to come that local officials here in Palomas, a town with only one fully paved main road, just added a clinic.

As Sosa walks around his shelter he points to the injured and says, "This has become a war zone, with war injuries and no resources." He added: "But governments need to know that deserts, rivers, walls are no match for hunger."

From afar on highway 9 between Columbus and El Paso, Trump's "big, beautiful wall" looks menacing, cutting like a wound along the Chihuahuan desert. Border Patrol vehicles roam the desert. Two migrants run through the brush. The wall is 30 feet high into the sky.

This means the wall is "at least three times taller, higher ing for a sharp increase in than an average person and the height results in multisystem trauma ... primarily leg fractures, ankle fractures, but also a lot of spinal neck and head injuries as well as deaths," said Ieva Jusionyte, author of Threshold: Emergency Responders on the U.S.-Mexico Border and associate professor of international security and anthropology at Brown University.

> The wall was supposed to be a key deterrent, Jusionyte added, "so that the more difficult you make it for people to come across without authorization, the thinking was," the more "people would get injured and people would die. So then others would be discouraged to follow in their tracks. But that just hasn't happened. And the border infrastructure is getting deadlier and people's reasons for moving are increasing, as well. So it is just a bad combination."

> Gomez began planning his trip north immediately after two hurricanes hit Central America last fall. He borrowed money from friends and family and waited for the holidays to end before making his way across Mexico. Today, he sits in a wheelchair, his ankles broken and in a cast. He sobs loudly, and he feels shame when he remembers falling from the wall. He said his injury will not break his resolve to cross into the United States.

"I promised my family I wouldn't come back until I can put a roof over their heads," he said, recalling the words he told his four children and his wife back in Guatemala.

Two migrants, both Hon-

durans who asked that their names be withheld because they may try to cross into the U.S. again, helped Gomez cross back into Mexico when he was injured. They haven't left his side since that evening in January. They help him bathe, undress, and give him pep talks.

"You'll walk soon and we'll continue our journey," said one, who along with the other Honduran were picked up by the Border Patrol in the desert after they ran out of water and gave up.

"Next time, we'll carry enough water," he quipped.

"I have bad news," added Sosa. "You won't walk. You will run again.'

Ushca Alcoser says he stares off into the distance most of the day. He dreads telling his family back in Ecuador "what really happened" because he doesn't want to worry them, especially "mommy, who has been ill." A day after they were in-

terviewed, both men were transported to a hospital some 100 miles away. They were X-rayed and were told Thursday that the injuries to their ankles, legs, pelvis and back will take as much as four to six months to heal. Ushca Alcoser, finally broke down and called his parents. He told them about falling from the wall and how the Border Patrol showed no mercy on him. "I told my son, why humili-

ate yourself there more, come home," said his father Segundo, in a phone interview. 'We're poor here, but we still have dignity. But he just cries and says he wants to work in the United States. There is no future for him here. He's young, full of illusions, hopes and dreams."

