

# THE MONITOR



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Page 10B | [vidaOutdoors](#)



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Page 3A | [Valley&State](#)

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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2022

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## Overwhelming needs

Older McAllen parents struggle to maintain home for children

BY MATT WILSON  
STAFF WRITER

McALLEN — Pat Ramirez likes to joke: for a woman who couldn't get pregnant, she sure wound up with a lot of children — half a dozen adoptees in total.

Pat, 67, and her husband, Mauro, 80, took them in over the years after hearing about their misfortunes. They'd wanted kids of their own, and didn't like to think about children being in need.

The Ramirezes are obviously not short on affection. They devoted most of their lives to making other peoples' children their own, and to seeing that those children didn't want for love and care.

Pat even struggles, a bit, at seeing why she ought to get some kind of help.

"We're just so blessed. I mean, so blessed. ... I don't know why — I'm not trying to be stupid, but I don't feel like I did anything to deserve it," she says.

Pat is wrong about that. She and her husband have been incredibly charitable over the years.

In the '80s, an acquaintance told them about a woman in Mexico living in abject poverty who was about to have a baby. They readily offered to adopt and were united with their first child as a newborn.

About 25 years ago, the same acquaintance told them about another girl — this one about four or five years old — who was not being treated well. That's how the Ramirezes got Diana, their second born.

"She had a broken leg, and her head was all scarred up," Pat said. "She'd been abused, so he took her to the hospital and they ended up putting her in traction



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Patty Ramirez reaches down to check a window unit in her disabled son's room on Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022, in McAllen.



for about two weeks. She was in a body cast for another month."

Diana still bears the scars on her head. The Ramirezes struggled for years to legal-

ize her status in the United States.

More recently, Mauro returned from a trip to Colorado to visit a son from a previous relationship, bringing back three granddaughters with him. Pat doesn't particularly like to talk about what was going on, but says there were problems with the kids' parents. The Ramirezes adopted all three.

See **NEEDS** | 7A

## Report on maternal deaths is forthcoming

BY ALLIE MORRIS  
DALLAS MORNING NEWS

AUSTIN — The state will release a highly anticipated report on maternal deaths as early as next week, ending months-long delay criticized by advocates and lawmakers alike.

The review of 2019 deaths will provide the most up to date look at what Texans are dying in pregnancy and the year after childbirth. Maternal health advocates say the findings are critical to help prevent more deaths and pressed for their release before the upcoming legislative session.

On Friday, officials outlined the level data at a meeting of the Texas Maternal and Morbidity Review Committee.

The vast majority of deaths were preventable and driven by six major causes, including hemorrhage, mental health conditions and infection. Disparities persisted, and Black Texans died at a disproportionately high rate.

See **PREGNANCY** | 1

## McAllen city court boosts accessibility and accountability

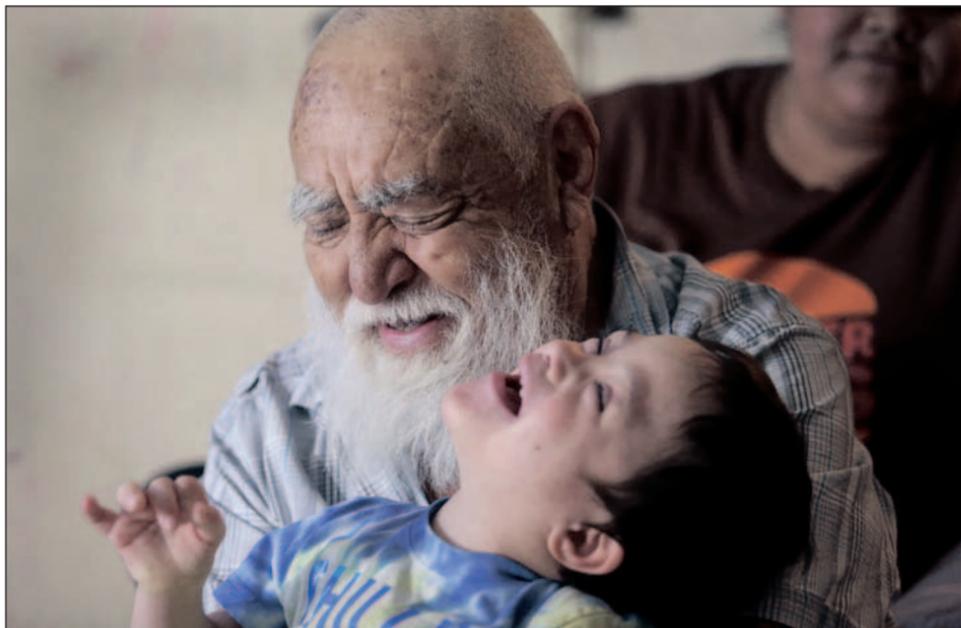
BY FRANCISCO E. JIMENEZ  
STAFF WRITER

McALLEN — The city of McAllen is ending the year by looking toward the future with the newly renovated McAllen Municipal Court.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held Friday morning to usher in a new technological era for the court, which also recently became a court record.

"We're having our grand reopening to celebrate some of the things that we've accomplished this year as a court — the first being the huge amount of tech upgrades that we did," Lauren Sepulveda, presiding judge of the Municipal Court of McAllen, said after the ceremony.

See **CEREMONY**



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Mauro Valdez Ramirez, 80, laughs with his son Alejo, 6, while in the living room of their home on Thursday Dec. 8, 2022, in McAllen. Alejo "Kenny" has Down syndrome and needs 24-hour care.

## NEEDS

From Page 1A

The last addition, Kenny, came from the same parents in 2016. He hasn't been officially adopted, but he's one of the clan.

"He's not going anywhere," Pat says.

Two of the children, including Kenny, have special needs. Kenny has Down syndrome, suffers from seizures and cannot swallow. He's fed through a gastrostomy tube on his stomach.

Financial aid has given Kenny fairly comprehensive care, and Pat says they've been lucky getting help.

"We all have our issues, and we're dealing with some major stuff, but overall they're blessings," she said. "If I retired, and I didn't have the kids here, I'd probably be on the couch, flicking the TV. They keep me alive."

The couple's problem is that they obviously need more help. Though their commitment to their kids is unwavering, the task seems at risk of being overwhelming.

Mauro acts like a younger man, but he's not anymore.

"He's starting to feel it," Pat says.

She's slowing down too.

Recent falls broke Pat's hip and pelvis. Up until a few months ago, she couldn't stand for long periods of time. Pat walks noticeably slouched.

The older couple live with their four children, all under the age of 13, in a fairly small home that's an affectionately chaotic scene.

There's a gagging trio of girls, a small pack of not-so-fearsome dogs and little baby Kenny, the apple of everybody's eye.

Pat and Mauro met 42 years ago doing factory work.

"He told me he was the



Mauro Valdez Ramirez with his family and wife Patty at their home on Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022, in McAllen.

ambassador to Mexico. And I didn't know him back then; now I know he's a liar, but I didn't know that back then," Pat teases.

Mauro will tease her right back. He likes to talk and he'll occasionally commandeer a story she's telling.

"Let me finish the rest of the story, Paul Harvey," he says with a twinkle in his eye.

Pat rolls her eyes and waits for a chance to get back into the conversation.

Pat's recent injuries, however, seem to have been a turning point for the family.

She returned from the hospital unable to do housework and maintenance. Things got away from her, and Mauro's getting too old to do many of them himself.

"What we struggle with is home repairs," Pat said.

The home is in disrepair. There's some leaks in the ceiling, and the particle board in the kitchen began to disintegrate a few years back.

Insulation sticks out of a hole in the wall by the girls' room. Plumbing in one of the home's two bathrooms sprung a leak a while back, so the Ramirez's had to close it off.

The house is cluttered and not particularly clean. Cockroaches are a problem.

"My friends," Mauro jokes as one crawls across a picture frame.

Mauro doesn't seem to be terribly disheartened. Pat, though, is struggling.

"It becomes overwhelming, and I get depressed," she said. "It's like, 'Forget it, give me something to eat, I'm gonna watch TV.' It exacerbates the problem."

Pat is more comfortable talking about the children, particularly about Kenny. She wants to see him walk across the stage at graduation one day. She says they're all blessings.

Diana, the couple's 30-year-old daughter, says her mom doesn't take enough credit for the sacrifices she's made and the struggles she's going through.

"My mom's always been the one to give," she said. "She's always giving and giving and giving, and she's never accepted to receive. And now she's learning to receive."

The Ramirez family is in particular need of funds for home repairs and renovations. The family could also use shelving, and funds for pest remediation.

To help, call the United Way of South Texas at (956) 686-6331 and inquire about this family and the Spirit of Christmas campaign. The Monitor has partnered with the United Way of South Texas to garner support for Rio Grande Valley families in need of monetary donations, or other items and gifts specified in this story.