

THE MONITOR



Ride or die
PSJA North rolls into regional final with support across RGV.

Page 1B | RGVSports

We at AIM Media stand with the Ukrainian people to support their freedom & sovereignty.

Please visit www.aimmediacares.com



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2022

SERVING THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY SINCE 1909

75 CENTS DAILY

Faithful fighter



Joel Martinez | jmartinez@themonitor.com

Nancy Salazar poses at her home on Friday, Dec. 2, 2022, in Mercedes.

As needs mount for family, Mercedes mother bravely battling cancer remains hopeful

BY DINA AREVALO
STAFF WRITER

MERCEDES — Mother of four Nancy Salazar just wants to go back to being the woman she was before. The woman who took her children to and from school, cheered them on at their athletic competitions and baked homemade goodies at Christmas.



Salazar wants to be the woman she was before breast cancer and seemingly endless illnesses robbed her of her en-

ergy and her independence. "I just want to get better," the 47-year-old said while sitting inside her home in rural north Mercedes on Friday.

"I just want to be the same person I used to be — active. Take my kids to school, bring them back home," she said.

Salazar's exhaustion was clearly visible as she sat at her kitchen table quietly recount-

ing the year-and-a-half of hell she and her family have been through.

In April 2021, Salazar was diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer. The diagnosis came as an anger-inducing surprise that she says made her go crazy when she first learned of it.

See FIGHTER | 8A

PSJA'S new super on the job

BY MATT WILSON
STAFF WRITER

PHARR — After an exceptionally fast leadership change in November, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo's new interim superintendent is promising stability and a servant-leader approach while he leads the district through a potentially turbulent near future.

Alejandro Elias, 53, officially started in the district's top spot on Wednesday, bringing a resume to the table that includes eight years as principal of PSJA Early College High School, other education positions, a doctorate, and a career prior to education in which he spent 15 years working his way through leadership positions with H-E-B.



Elias

Elias is somewhat soft spoken, and a bit camera shy.

The Pharr native and PSJA grad was evidently having a busy first week in charge. He said in his first two days he'd met with representatives from UTRGV and STC, 46 district principals and other stakeholders.

See SUPER | 7A

TWC labor commissioner Alvarez, Valley native, to resign

By RICK KELLEY
STAFF WRITER

HARLINGEN — Texas Work-

FIGHTER

From Page 1A

That's because Salazar had been dutifully getting mammograms in the five years leading up to her diagnosis. Doctors had noticed something in those scans, but had assured her that it was nothing to worry about.

"I've always checked myself every year. And for five years, they would tell me it was just hard tissue — until (the fifth year), they said something was wrong," Salazar recalled.

"So, I had to go get a biopsy and that's when the doctor said it was cancer. Stage 3," she said.

What followed next was a mastectomy to remove the cancerous tissue from her left breast, as well as chemotherapy and radiation.

Salazar also underwent the preliminary stages of reconstructive surgery, where muscle tissue from her abdomen was grafted in place of the removed breast tissue.

The harsh cancer treatments are over now — and Salazar is thankfully in remission — but she's still in the midst of the reconstruction process.

That process has been hampered, however, by repeated bouts of infection at the surgery site which have kept the wound from closing and healing properly.

She's scheduled to meet with an infectious disease doctor about the issue later this month.

It seems every stage of her illness and recovery has been fraught with complications.

"I get scared sometimes, but I have to keep on," Salazar said as her voice broke and tears began to well in her eyes.

As if the cancer wasn't bad enough, Salazar also had to deal with a lengthy hospital stay after she contracted some sort of viral infection earlier this fall.

That infection hospitalized her for 15 days. Afterward, she contracted COVID-19.

Just when she had recovered from those two illnesses, her husband, Sergio Salazar Sr., 44, was in a vehicular accident that has kept him out of work as a commercial driver.

About a month ago, Sergio and a colleague were returning from Weslaco when another driver's vehicle slid on the rain-slicked road and slammed into their truck.

The truck was totalled and Sergio has struggled



Joel Martinez | jmartinez@themonitor.com

Nancy Salazar poses at her home on Friday, Dec. 2, 2022, in Mercedes.

with pain since.

"It's something very difficult for us because we're not used to (being) with no energy," Salazar said.

She can no longer volunteer at her 11-year-old son, Jeshua's, school. She can't attend her 16-year-old son, Sergio Jr.'s baseball games with the Mercedes Tigers, where he plays first base.

She no longer has the strength to roll out dough to make mini-empanadas, or "empanaditas," that she traditionally makes at Christmastime, Salazar said.

She can't even shower normally anymore since she's lost significant range of motion in her left arm.

But though disease has sapped her strength, it hasn't diminished her faith.

During the worst moments — those moments lying in a hospital bed for the umpteenth time and worrying if she would survive — God has gotten her through it.

"God's been with me all this time because I'm still here. I've gone through so much, but He's always been by my side," Salazar said.

It was difficult for Salazar to share her story, to ask for help.

She and her family are humble people. They live in a manufactured house off of Farm-to-Market Road 491 in rural Mercedes.

A gaggle of blue heeler dogs greet visitors with friendly sniffs and scary, but harmless barks. The

dogs warm up quickly, though, and are soon enough asking for pets.

When she was healthy, Salazar enjoyed feeding them out of her hands.

Humility aside, both Salazar's family and her home could use some help.

She was shy about naming specifics, but since their recent hardships, the Salazar family has struggled to pay bills.

Portions of the floor in their modest home have been patched with plywood where there are gaps.

"We don't like to ask... That's how I am," Salazar said.

Her older son needs new baseball cleats in size 11.5 for the upcoming season.

And her younger son dreams of having a much-coveted PlayStation5, she said. Or, Pokémon cards.

Her daughters, 20-year-old Christina and 24-year-old Julissa, are attending college. They would appreciate workout clothes in size small, toys and treats for their dogs, or gift cards.

"We didn't have a lot, but we had enough for our kids. But now, it's different," Salazar said.

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.