

## Perennial RGV candidate faces DWI charge in Willacy County

BY FERNANDO DEL VALLE  
STAFF WRITER

RAYMONDVILLE — Former three-time state candidate Vanessa Tijerina is facing a drunk driving charge while on probation following several arrests during the last five years.

Tijerina was released Wednesday afternoon from the Willacy County Jail after posting \$500 bail following her arraignment before Justice of the Peace Rudy Cantu, who had set bond at \$5,000, a jail officer said Thursday.

On Tuesday night, a state trooper arrested Tijerina on State Highway 186, charging her with driving while intoxicated, Sgt. Maria Montalvo, a spokeswoman with the Texas Department of Public Safety, said.

At about 9:30 p.m., Tijerina called police for help, Montalvo said.

“She called, stating she was involved in a crash,” she said. “Based on the trooper’s investigation, there was no crash.”

On Thursday, Tijerina, a nurse, could not be reached for comment.

The arrest came while Tijerina was on probation, Tobin Lefler, director of the Cameron and Willacy County adult probation department, said.

Tijerina’s probation stems from a family law case, in which the court restricted her contact with her ex-husband and children, he said.

“It’s more of a family law case,” Lefler said. “It’s not a criminal case.”

See **DWI** | **7B**

## Investigation continues into man’s death in Brownsville jail

BY LAURA B. MARTINEZ  
STAFF WRITER

## ‘We just kept praying’



Photos by Joel Martinez | jmartinez@themonitor.com

Jason Rangel stands in his living room at their home on Thursday, Dec. 1, 2022, in Mercedes.

## Mercedes family touched by tragedies live on faith, not much else

BY DINA ARÉVALO  
STAFF WRITER

MERCEDES — For Jason Lee Rangel, God moves people even in the most difficult times — perhaps especially during those times. And nowhere has that been more evident than with his own family.

Over the last year, the 40-year-old father and his wife, April Rangel, 39, have endured more than their fair share of tribulations.

The Rangels are a blended family. Jason has two children — Heaven Marie, 17, and Jason Michael Jr., 9 — while April has three — Ashley Cosme, 20, Fernando



An X-ray of pins that were placed in the hip of Ashley Cosme are shown from a phone at their home on Thursday, Dec. 1, 2022, in Mercedes.

Cosme Jr., 18, and Damacio Cosme, 17.

But more than one hardship has struck their Brady

bunch recently.

Last year, Claudia, the mother of Jason’s children died of COVID-19 at the age of 37.

She and the two children had both contracted the virus.

Jason said Claudia had latched onto skepticism regarding the COVID-19 vaccine and had refused to get vaccinated or vaccinate the children.

Claudia and Jason Michael got the sickest.

They got sick in mid-August 2021. By Aug. 27 of that year, Claudia called Jason and April to tell them she was calling for an

See **FAITH** | **7B**

# FAITH

From Page 1B

ambulance because she was having trouble breathing.

“So, dad went to go pick them up and they’ve stayed since. Since Aug. 27, they never went back home,” April said.

While Claudia’s health continued to deteriorate in the hospital, Jason’s son, whom they call by his middle name, Michael, was getting sicker at home.

The couple battled to keep his fevers down. His breathing was labored. He rarely woke, except to use the restroom or take medication, April said.

She and Jason stayed up around the clock, fearful of the rollercoaster of fevers Michael was experiencing.

“It really looked like he was dying in front of us,” Jason said.

The couple relied on their faith to keep them going.

“We just kept praying and one day, we just got the rosary, we started praying, and two days later, my son starts waking up,” Jason said.

On Sept. 8, 2021, Claudia slipped into a coma from which she would never awake. She died on Sept. 25, 2021.

“Her lungs had turned into rocks,” April said.

Claudia had had primary custody of her and Jason’s kids, but when they came to live with him permanently after her death, he practically had to start over from scratch.

Jason had to buy all their most basic needs, such as clothes, after the children’s stepfather had gotten rid of things in the move.

Jason also learned his kids, especially Michael, had a lot of catching up to do.

Little Michael has developmental and intellectual delays that had gone largely untreated before coming to live with his dad full time.

“As soon as we got him, that whole year, it was just, like, nothing but doctors’ visits,” Jason said.

“It was just so many that we had to do just to find out what was really going on,” he said.

Soon, the family calendar filled up with droves of appointments — doctors, dentists, speech and occupational therapists and more.

April tried her best to navigate it all while Jason worked as a heavy equipment operator for the city of Weslaco’s public works department — a job he had just obtained in October 2020 after the COVID-19 pandemic had made his previous job as a school bus driver untenable due to lack of hours.

But things soon became overwhelming for April, who is also the full-time caregiver for her eldest daughter, Ashley.

In 2016, Ashley was struck by a motorist while riding her bicycle to a nearby store.

The collision left her paralyzed from the chest down. After weeks in a coma and months in a hospital, the then-eighth grader woke up to find she could only move her left arm and the fingers on her right hand.

A trained computer accountant and licensed insurance agent, April had to stop working in order to care for Ashley.

While the pandemic had forced schools to close, it also put a pause on the extensive medical treatments Ashley had been continuing to undergo since her accident.

But as the world began to reopen in 2021, Ashley’s doctors began calling again, April said. It was time to start planning for the surgeries and procedures that the pandemic had postponed.

“Their mom passed away in September (2021) and we thought, OK, we can handle this,” April said of meeting the needs of Jason’s children.

“And then it started to where my daughter had these appointments and I need to be here at this time, but how do I handle being over (there) with Michael?” she said.

Ashley needs multiple surgeries, including on her feet and repairing one of her femurs, which is missing the ball that sits in the hip socket.

April has lost count of how many surgeries Ashley has already endured thus far.

But April beams when she speaks of her daughter.

She proudly tells the story of how April was named the KRGV student of the week during her senior year of high school.

And following in her parents’ example, Ashley, too, is a person of faith.

April said her daughter has forgiven the man who paralyzed her.

Ashley herself explains she did so because of the lessons of forgiveness she learned in church.

“The moment I opened my eyes and I was able to ... talk and be normal in my own way, I forgave him,” Ashley said.

“I couldn’t be mad at somebody that made a mistake that they didn’t mean to make,” she added.

Ashley’s optimism is infectious.

Doctors originally told April that she “might not come back.”

The accident caused what’s called a Class 3 diffused axonal brain injury. It’s a type of injury that affects the brain stem, which controls the body’s automatic processes, such as breathing.

But Ashley did come back. She finished high school. She’s attending college classes.

In her free time, she speeds through novels — especially those by her favorite author, Cassandra Clare, a fantasy writer.