

THE MONITOR



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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2022

SERVING THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY SINCE 1909

75 CENTS DAILY

Where love resides



Photos by Joel Martinez | jmartinez@themonitor.com

Marisela Gonzalez stands outside her home on Friday, Dec. 2, 2022, in Mission.

Mission household labors to make a home out of cramped space

BY VALERIE GONZALEZ
STAFF WRITER

A mostly wooden-frame home sprung from the finds by the patriarch of the Gonzalez family, a scrap collector, provides shelter for three families, three generations in all. It's an intimacy cherished, not resented.

Marisela Gonzalez, 43, lives with her husband, who's also 43, her in-laws in their 60s, her children ranging from ages 8 through 22, and the eldest son's wife.

The small house in Mission grew by additions made slowly over the years, though the pace can't seem to keep up with the family's growth.

Gonzalez's youngest, Debora, sleeps with her parents on a mattress the father



Marisela Gonzalez stands inside her home on Friday, Dec. 2, 2022, in Mission.

found during one of his daily treks searching for scrap metal or used furniture they resell as part of their livelihood. A twin bed, where the

12-year-old boy sleeps, was squeezed between a wall and abutted the mattress.

Debora likes to wake up early with her grandmother

who sleeps in a room across from her parents' bedroom. Marisela said she likes to check on her grandmother, who suffers from liver problems prompted by diabetes, constantly.

"Debora went to the bathroom door and knocked asking, 'are you feeling OK, grandma?'" Marisela said, a common occurrence.

In a room adjoined to the grandparents' bedroom and separated by a curtain is a drafty addition decorated by the touch of a young, aspiring student nursing a dream.

A poster is pinned in the corner of Merari Gonzalez's room, with a list: graduate, soccer, music, travel, food, own a company, go see sun-

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TxDOT sets \$250M for pedestrian, bike safety

BY RICK KELLEY
STAFF WRITER

TxDOT officials have announced they are making around \$250 million available to communities to make travel safer for pedestrians and bicyclists.

This federal funding, for which communities will have to apply, will go toward sidewalks, bike lanes, shared-use paths and other projects to enhance walking and biking transportation.

"Making it safer and easier to walk and bike is an important part of our mission of 'Connecting You with Texas,'" TxDOT Transportation Commissioner Robert "Robbie" Vaughn said. "I'm thrilled to see this increase in funding that'll help communities build impactful improvements for its citizens.

"As a jogger and cyclist myself, I know the value these enhancements can bring to help Texans get to work, run errands, and enjoy the beautiful Texas outdoors," he added.

The number of pedestrians and cyclists killed on Texas highways has been rising for several years, with pedestrian fatalities

See **BIKE SAFETY** | 8A

Anti-drunk driving campaign urges to 'Drive Sober'

BY RICK KELLEY
STAFF WRITER

Nearly one in four fatal holiday season traffic accidents are DUI-involved crashes, and TxDOT is kicking off its "Drive Sober. No Regrets" campaign to raise awareness of the danger.

According to TxDOT, last year Texas saw 48,641 traffic crashes occur during the holiday season from Dec. 1 through Jan. 2.

In those accidents, 433 people were killed and another 60,000

LOVE RESIDES

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sets. The 17-year-old is on track to finish her first goal in May.

"She uses this heater," Marisela Gonzalez, Merari's mom, said, pointing to a small space heater on the floor. "They gave it to us about 11 years ago."

Merari slept late that Thursday, at 3 a.m. finishing her anatomy and physiology homework, a project on Myotonia, using a borrowed computer before having to wake up and be at school by 8 a.m.

"I may not know a lot, but I'm working hard," Marisela said, recalling the words of her studious daughter. "I tell her if you want to go up north to study, go do that. Go study. Start opening up a new path for yourself."

The young teenager is weighing her options. Merari is between becoming a civil engineer or a graphic designer, but considers the cost of a four-year degree compared to a shorter one.

All along, Marisela encourages her to strive for her goals.

"I tell my daughter, I can't help you with much, maybe a little with support," Marisela said, recalling conversations she's had with Merari. "If you want to sell something, I can help you with that, so you can find the career you want. Dreams will cost you."

Marisela herself was unable to get a high school education due to her family's financial circumstances, but she's worked

hard to help her children excel academically despite her shortcomings.

As an adult, Marisela, a native Spanish-speaker, borrowed books from her brother who was a teacher in Mexico. Over persistent, independent study, she learned how to read and understand English, though she is unable to speak it.

When her oldest son was born, she set out to ensure he would be bilingual. By using a Spanish-English dictionary and a stern hand, her eldest now speaks fluently in both languages. Now, Marisela is trying to read up on scholarship opportunities she comes across on news broadcasts or online for Merari.

The mother's strong will serves as a guiding light to her family in other ways, too.

Marisela is working to remodel a part of her home to convert it into a bedroom for the children. Walls were broken, a toilet pulled out, and with the addition of a new wall, a hallway-turned-closet might soon become the new room where Marisela plans to move in a bunk bed her husband found along with Merari's bed.

The process is time-consuming and costly. Marisela does a little bit at a time, as she has to wait for her husband to help her move some of the heavier pieces.

Her husband and her father-in-law wake up early to drive around Mission and northwestern Hidalgo County looking for things they can sell like old water

heater tanks, headboards, sinks, tables, desks, or even Christmas trees like one the family had in their backyard last Thursday.

Marisela and her family will sell their wares at the pulga or even at road intersections to help make ends meet.

The Gonzalezes are resourceful and keep chickens, cats, dogs and even pigs in their backyard. The chickens that roam the yard will soon begin to start laying eggs again, while the small dogs wander about guarding the entrance from stray animals that threaten to harm the poultry or damage the merchandise.

But even those tiny mouths have become a challenge to feed, and Marisela is considering whether it may be best to send them to the animal shelter.

With winter upon the Valley, Marisela prioritizes the well-being of her children who are in need of warm clothing and her mother-in-law, whose wheelchair needs replacing.

Although her family may be struggling now, Marisela said she will continue working to create a brighter future for her children.

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.