

# THE MONITOR



**Hoops happenings**  
PSJA North faced La FERIA at the C.E. Vail boys basketball tournament.  
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**Coming home**  
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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2022

SERVING THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY SINCE 1909

75 CENTS DAILY

## Helping hand



Photos by Joel Martinez | [jmartinez@themonitor.com](mailto:jmartinez@themonitor.com)

Olga Hernandez holds back tears as she speaks of their hardships at her home on Friday, Dec. 2, 2022, in Mercedes.

### Mercedes teen shoulders family's needs amid health, money issues

BY FRANCISCO E. JIMENEZ  
STAFF WRITER

MERCEDES — The Hernandez family sat together on one of the two brown couches inside the otherwise empty living room, save for a small fan near the far end of the room.

The walls are bare, serving as a reminder of the sacrifices made by Olga and her children to make ends meet — a seemingly uphill battle both economically and healthwise.

Olga, a single mother of four, finds it difficult to be around at all times due to a fluctuating work schedule, one that sometimes has her waking up in the middle of the night to go to work. Her shift at a Stripes convenience store sometimes begins at 3



Alan Borjas, 17, speaks about his responsibilities at his home on Friday, Dec. 2, 2022, in Mercedes.

a.m.

With her eldest daughter attending school, Olga has had to rely on her eldest son, 17-year-old Alan Borjas, an

11th grader at Mercedes High School. He has assumed responsibility over his younger siblings, 12-year-old Dulce Maria Lopez and seven-year-

old Edwin Lopez, and sometimes assumed the role of caretaker for his mother.

"I'm always the one asking them how school was and, 'What did they learn today? Do they need help with anything?'" Alan said. "I've been called an uncle, a dad, and pretty much a brother. I really care for my family."

Those responsibilities have sometimes interfered with his own education, resulting in him missing school sometimes to be there for his family.

"My mom is really hardworking and sometimes she really needs to stay at home and I need to be around her in case she needs anything," he said. "I'm just here to support them."

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Delcia Lopez | [dlopez@themonitor.com](mailto:dlopez@themonitor.com)  
Border Patrol agents walk past the area where an agent died when his ATV crashed into the guard rail on Thursday Dec. 8, 2022, in Mission.

### Gate nixed after agent's death, other accidents

BY DINA ARÉVALO  
STAFF WRITER

MISSION — Just one day after U.S. Border Patrol agent Raul Gonzalez Jr. died when his ATV collided with a steel gate here, that gate — which caused two previous accidents and prompted safety concerns from locals as early as five years ago — has been removed.

"From what we can tell, they arrived and initiated the removal around 5 p.m. after we closed (Wednesday)" Marianna Treviño Wright, executive director of the butterfly center, said Thursday.

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### South Texas Health Systems celebrates 'Level I trauma' designation

BY DINA ARÉVALO  
STAFF WRITER

MCALLEN — One of the Rio Grande Valley's largest hospital systems celebrated a new milestone Thursday.

STHS McAllen, the 441-bed hospital located just off of Expressway 83, recently became the second hospital in the Valley to earn a Level I trauma center designation by the Texas Department of State Health Services.

It was a designation years in the making, according to hospital officials.

That designation is the highest a hospital can achieve and means that it is equipped to handle the worst emergency medical crises a patient can face.

"There were insurmountable

# TEEN

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Olga can't help but beam about her son.

"He's very smart. The principal said Alan is very smart and if everyone was as bright as he is, it would be a better school," his mother boasted. "He does that kind of work easily."

Alan said he hopes to attend the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley after he graduates from high school. He has yet to decide on a career path, but he is leaning toward electrical or mechanical engineering.

"I really want to go to UTRGV. I've visited there like four times already, and stuff has been really interesting," he said. "I just want to earn a lot of money so that I can have enough to give and enough to keep."

When asked about the type of responsibilities a 17-year-old could assume that may affect his education, Alan said that it's a sacrifice that he is willing to make.

"It's life. We don't really know what things could happen," Alan said. "I'm the one that needs to take it because sometimes I do really good in school. I prefer to be the one to stay



Joel Martinez | [jmartinez@themonitor.com](mailto:jmartinez@themonitor.com)

Left to right, Alan Borjas, 17, Olga Hernandez, Dulce Lopez, 12, and Edmond, 7, sit on the couch in their home on Friday, Dec. 2, 2022, in Mercedes.

if they need my help from home. I'll make the sacrifice."

He has found himself in such situations more times than one might consider. Roughly three months ago, his mother was forced to undergo a surgical operation to remove a cyst from her left eye.

She went to a local doctor and an eye doctor, but she was not given any answers to what was causing her eye to become inflamed.

After paying several doctor fees and spending multiple days at home after she was advised to keep her eye away from

hot places, she decided to go to Mexico where she underwent surgery to remove the cyst.

Then came the recovery process, which forced her to miss additional time from work. She said that she was fortunate to keep her job, but the time off made her fall behind on payments.

"When you get behind, you get really behind. When you have a problem, you have a lot more problems," she said. "When it rains, it pours."

She sold a TV that used to be in the living room, which provided some temporary relief, but she was still behind on her rent and light and water bills.

With all hope seemingly lost, Olga turned to her faith.

"One night when I was up real late around 2 a.m. I felt so desperate. 'God, I feel alone,'" she recalled, her voice breaking as she recounted that night. "You feel alone at that time, like you have no one.

"I told God, 'I feel like I can't anymore. I don't know what I'm going to do.'"

Six hours later, she got a phone call.

"Ms. Hernandez, you were nominated for this program," the message on her phone said, referring to United Way's Spirit of Christmas.

"This was God," Olga said. "This wasn't a coincidence to me, because I had just been praying."

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.