

VALLEY/NATION

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~J. GONZALEZ

STORM

FROM PAGE A1

"There are little moments that happen. You never know what kind of photo you're going to capture," said Sanchez of his art. "I'm fascinated by the weather. Storms, hurricanes — we don't get many tornadoes, otherwise I'd be out there chasing them, too."

While some might find his hobby out of the ordinary, the photographs speak for themselves. Last week when a post-hurricane lightening storm hit the lower Valley, Sanchez was outside, watching lightning bolts light up the sky across neighborhoods and farmland.

Asked how he is able to capture the strikes in time, Sanchez said he's able to shoot manually, but recently purchased a device which detects flashes of infrared light as a strike develops. The device triggers the shutter, allowing him to get more shots.

He explained, "If you want to do it the lazy way and you don't want to miss shots, that's the way to do it. You hook it up to your camera. It's a shutter release. This little device senses an infrared signal or discharge the lightning sets off."

"If you get the camera on a tripod and just aim it towards the storm, you'll hear the shutter click when there's a flash of lightning. You just have to adjust your camera settings if it's getting closer or brighter."

On a recent Saturday, lightning was flashing so frequently that Sanchez opted to hold the camera to his eye, pressing the shutter manually. The photographer described the storm as a dream come true. "As soon as I would see a flash, I would take the photos. I had the camera set to take continuous shots. Lightning would flash and after I would have eight, ten photos," he said.

Not all of the scenery of a photographer's collection is chaotic. Sanchez's two-year battle with cancer has pushed him to make time to stop and appreciate these ephemeral, moving moments happening around us as life trudges along. He regularly wakes up at 5 in the morning to watch the sunrise on South Padre Island.

Currently, his social media pages are filled to the brim with photos sun-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DANIEL SANCHEZ

Top: This image provided by photographer Daniel Sanchez shows lightning strikes during a recent storm in Los Fresnos. The photographer edits the photos to make them most look how the moment happened, he explained. **Above:** Stars shine in the night sky in this image provided by Sanchez.

rise at the beach. They are posted by both Sanchez and clients, who thank him for vibrant, colorful canvas-wrapped prints hanging inside homes and offices.

He says some of the most beautiful photographs come before the sun even breaks the horizon. Many of the images are shot in near darkness, and at the ocean, ghostly water is captured moving through the frame while the shutter is opened longer — a technique used to capture the flow.

"For me, photography gives me that awareness. There's so much out there to appreciate and be grateful for — just looking out the window and watching the sunrises. It's an amazing experience. It's a way to get your mind off of all this crazy stuff that's going on. I think connection with nature

makes you more aware of the beauty that we're surrounded by every day. We get so busy with everyday life that we overlook the little things," said Sanchez.

For those interested in the technicalities of the work, Sanchez shoots on a DSLR — a digital single lens reflex camera, which can be adjusted acutely to fine-tune photographs and is compatible with many lenses. He captures images on manual, allowing him to adjust the ISO sensitivity, shutter speed, white balance, and the depth of field of each image.

After, he edits in Photoshop with images shot in RAW format, which means they're uncompressed and can be processed with more precision and less data loss. Sanchez doesn't edit heavily and

instead aims to make the photographs nearly identical to what he saw in person.

This includes adjusting white balance, contrast, as well as saturation and vibrancy. Sharpness and noise reduction can be used as needed, but aren't always necessary. "Each photo requires slightly different adjustments," Sanchez explained.

"I try to get the settings as close as I can to where they look good right out of the camera. I then make adjustments to make the photo look as close as possible to what I saw with my eyes when I took the photo."

Sanchez's photographs are viewable in an online gallery at www.danielsanchez.shootproof.com.

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SCHOOL

FROM PAGE A1

They urged Congress to include funding in the next pandemic relief bill for scholarship assistance for economically disadvantaged families to use at Catholic or other private schools.

Many Catholic schools already have received substantial federal aid from the U.S. Department of Education and from the Paycheck Protection Program, which was designed to pay wages at businesses or nonprofits impacted by the pandemic.

The pace of closures has been relentless since March. Within the past month, Catholic leaders have announced the shuttering of five schools in Newark, New Jersey, and 26 in the New York City area. Among the schools closed earlier was the Institute of Notre Dame in Baltimore, a 173-year-old girl's high school that's the alma mater of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Several of the closures have promoted protests and petition campaigns by angry parents, and Catholic officials have been scrambling to help affected families.

The Diocese of Brooklyn's school superintendent, Thomas Chadzutko, said the closures were unavoidable due to the pandemic's "devastating effects" on enrollment and finances.

Parents were offered a \$500 grant if their children enrolled in other Catholic schools, but many were bitter that the closures were announced with little time to make alternative school plans.

"It is a complete travesty how the Brooklyn Diocese can shut down schools within a pandemic and with less than two months' notice," parent Javier Cortes wrote in an online post about the closure of Queen of the Rosary Catholic Academy. "Treating children like this is NOT the Catholic thing to do!"

Also ordered closed was Nativity of Our Blessed Lady, an elementary school in the Bronx.

"I was part of the first graduating class and now I walked out of there hysterical in tears," said Hope Wilson, who attended the school as a child and later taught there for 30 years. "It's heartbreaking."

In Newark, Shante McGlone Burgess was devastated by the news that St. Francis Xavier School was closing. All three of her children attended the elementary school last year, though the family is not Catholic.

"They were very welcoming there," McGlone Burgess said. "At a public school, I don't think my children would have gotten the same camaraderie, as well as the structure."

St. Francis Xavier is one of many schools being closed that serve predominantly Black and Hispanic communities. Three bishops who oversee matters related to education and racial issues recently sent an appeal to U.S. Rep. Karen Bass, chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus, seeking support for families of color with students in Catholic schools.

"A Black or Latino child is 42% more likely to graduate from high school, and two-and-a-half times more likely to graduate from college if he or she attends a Catholic school," wrote Bishops Michael Barber of Oakland, California, Joseph Perry of Chicago and Shelton Fabre of the Houma-Thibodaux Diocese in Louisiana.

At the National Catholic Educational Association, there's acute concern about the closures' consequences.

"Catholic schools have a very profound impact on young people of low-income backgrounds, students of color, kids from single-parent homes," said the NCEA's chief innovation officer, Kevin Baxter. "That makes it all the more tragic if we lose the Catholic schools that serve those populations."

One consequence of the turmoil: increased interest in Catholic-oriented homeschooling.

RV parks hope for Winter Texans' return

BY HENRY MILLER
STAFF WRITER

The Rio Grande Valley's Winter Texan parks today might resemble an old western ghost town, the flying carpools, tree limbs and debris from Hurricane Hanna replacing the cliché tumbleweed and dirt twisters. The ghostliness is normal; not so much the hurricane debris. But, 2020 has redefined normal or, at best, has emphasized that which is abnormal.

But the stillness and silence is louder and more prevalent than in the past. While managers and other personnel at these parks would be preparing to take reservations for the upcoming Winter Texan season, the phones are also eerily silent, maybe a ring here or there — questions about COVID-19 usually following.

Just like with high schools in South Texas and with many businesses, Winter Texans, the parks and the entertainers who travel from all over the country to enjoy the Valley

are on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has prompted national media attention in the area and made it a virus hotspot.

It's a hurry-up-and-wait scenario that has all those involved guessing at best at what the season will — or will not — bring.

Barbara and Lonny Schuhmacher are the managers at Texas Trails Park on Owassa Road in Pharr. The Park has about 850 lots/spaces for Winter Texans to set up. The park, which usually holds weekly summer dances for those who stay year round, is not closed, but also not open in the regular sense. There are no activities, no pools and the friendship hall is on lockdown.

"They're bored to tears," Barb said. "Many of them are afraid. There's no more hugging and carrying on. There are no more dances or bingo or Friday hamburger night. The only things open basically are the shuffleboard courts, where you have two to a side and the outdoor swimming pool."

POSTAL

FROM PAGE A1

The agency's new leader, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, a former supply-chain CEO and a major donor to Trump and other Republicans, has pushed cost-cutting measures to eliminate overtime pay and hold mail until the next day if postal distribution centers are running late.

DeJoy, 63, of North Carolina, was tapped to head the service by a Trump-appointed board of governors and started in June. He is the first postmaster general in nearly two decades who is not a career postal employee.

DeJoy has said repeatedly that the Postal Service is in a financially untenable position and needs to rein in expenses. This past week, it reported \$2.2 billion in losses during the three months that ended in June.

Postal leaders want at

least a \$10 billion infusion from Congress as well as regulatory changes that would end a costly mandate that they fund in advance billions of dollars in retiree health benefits.

"Without dramatic change, there is no end in sight, and we face an impending liquidity crisis," DeJoy told the Postal Service's governing board Friday.

Memos from post office leadership, obtained by The Associated Press, detailed an elimination of overtime and a halting of late delivery trips that are sometimes needed to make sure deliveries arrive on time. One document said if distribution centers are running behind, "they will keep the mail for the next day." Another said: "One aspect of these changes that may be difficult for employees is that — temporarily — we may see mail left behind or mail on the workroom floor or docks."

Additional records obtained by AP outline

upcoming reductions of hours at post offices, including closures during lunch and on Saturdays. Rumors have also circulated about the potential for entire offices to shutter, after the Postal Service told Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., that regional managers there have identified 12 offices for "feasibility studies." Postal employees have been recently instructed not to talk to news media while on duty, according to another memo obtained by AP.

The changes have taken their toll on the Postal Service's 630,000 employees.

"As they risk their health each day along with other front-line essential workers, letter carriers have become angry, frustrated and embarrassed by various USPS management initiatives that are now resulting in delayed mail and undelivered routes in many areas of the country," said Fredric Rolando, president of the National Association

of Letter Carriers, which represents nearly 300,000 carriers nationwide.

The new policies have angered lawmakers from both parties and drawn criticism from former President Barack Obama, who said the current administration is "undermining the Postal Service in an election that's going to be dependent on mail-in ballots."

DeJoy has been the target of multiple letters from members of Congress who have called on the postmaster general to rescind his measures and have complained about a lack of transparency from the agency. Eighty-four House members, including four Republicans, signed a letter that said it is "vital that the Postal Service does not reduce mail delivery hours, which could harm rural communities, seniors, small businesses and millions of Americans who rely on the mail for critical letters and packages."