

# TODAY'S CATHOLIC

PEOPLE YOU WANT TO KNOW. NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW.

APRIL 11, 2025

21

## AROUND THE ARCHDIOCESE

### Faith in action: Honoring legacy of Atanacio Garcia

San Antonio City Council unanimously approved renaming the San Antonio Natatorium to Atanacio Garcia Natatorium on March 20, recognizing the determined COPS/Metro leader and parishioner of Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine who organized his community to create the city's first Olympic-sized public pool on the West Side.

Garcia, who died in 2014, was a man who lived out the Catholic values of human dignity and the call to community and participation through his persistence in advocating for his neighborhood.

The West Side was and continues to be the poorest area in San Antonio. In the early 1970s, many of its streets were unpaved, children had few opportunities for formal recreation, and inadequate drainage meant that people, especially kids, would drown walking home from school and in their own homes.

Garcia had a vision for his neighborhood and the children on the West Side. He took his clipboard and his children and walked the neighbor-

hood, gathering petition signatures for an Olympic-sized pool in the heart of the West side.

In a letter to the mayor and City Council, he said, "As parents and grownups, we should be concerned not only about housing, dressing, feeding, and providing our children with education but we must also prepare them and help them make their way in life. We can teach them hygiene, good manners, to work, about religion, we can teach them how to dance and how to swim. All this shall make them useful to society."

"For many years, on the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Garcias participated in the annual 21-mile pilgrimage the church did with its sister Guadalupe parish in Helotes," wrote Elaine Ayala of the *San Antonio Express-News*.

In 1974, Garcia's pastor, Father Edmundo Rodriguez, joined hands with other West and South Side parishes to create an organization that would get



the city's attention: Communities Organized for Public Service, or COPS. Between 1974-1980, Garcia and other parish leaders lobbied for the West and South Side's fair share of the city budget.

They block walked to get out the vote and were successful in securing hundreds of millions in bond money for the pool, and also for parks, libraries, and drainage infrastructure. The world-class swimming facility continues to be enjoyed by families across San Antonio and was home to several highly competitive swimmers, including Adrian Montoya and Josh Davis, an Olympic qualifier and three-time gold medal winner, respectively.

During the City Council hearing to rename the natatorium in Garcia's honor, several of the people who were shaped by Garcia testified, including family, community leaders who he mentored, and former Congressman Charlie Gonzalez, who stated, "This is much more than an Olympic-sized pool, which is a major contribution. This is about the spirit and dedication of a man that really should be a role model for all of us."

Rose Garcia, a second-generation COPS/Metro leader, said "(My Dad) received a lot of nos — no land, no money. He never gave up. In 2022, Pope Francis blessed my Madrecita Gloria and my Dad's photos and he also blessed COPS/Metro leaders for their work."