

FAMILY SAVED FROM FLOOD WATERS

by YESSICA NARANJO

When Juan Pablo Rojas went to bed Saturday night, he could have never imagined the events of the following morning. Awakened by his stepfather around 7 a.m., Rojas was confused.

When he looked around, everything seemed normal. When he looked outside, he could hardly believe his eyes.

"I was shocked," Rojas said. "I've never seen anything like that."

The water was nearly 6 feet deep, surrounding the apartment complex and covering both of his cars almost completely.

Rojas, 20, who had recently moved back from Greenville and was living in the apartment with his newlywed mother, had not anticipated the flood warnings to become a reality.

"I was just trying to stay with my mom as much as possible," Rojas said. "She was nervous and crying. She wouldn't calm down."

The apartments, that stand on Fort Jackson Blvd. off of exit 10, were one of the first places hit by the flood. While some residents managed to evacuate in time, others, like Rojas and his family, were not aware of the warning.

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JUAN PABLO ROJAS
20,

A few miles away, Rojas's cousin, Carlos Diaz, who had spent the night at his in-laws' home, had recently awakened to news of the flooded apartments.

"My first reaction was we need to go get them," Diaz said. "The apartments were old and could collapse."

While Diaz's wife and family sat around the living room in a silent panic, Diaz went outside to initiate a rescue with Ovil Valdes, his wife's stepfather.

"When I went to go see Ovil, we both knew what we needed to do," Diaz said. "Very little words were spoken. We just acted."

And that's exactly what they did. They hopped into Valdes's truck and safely made their way around the blocked and flooded roads. When they reached the apartments, they were speechless.

"We would have never imagined it so bad," Diaz said. "As we pulled up, someone was already knee deep in water, so my first thought was the power must be off." Despite that, Diaz was shocked to discover that the second story apartments still had power.

"We needed to act quickly to get them out." As Diaz searched for a method to get his family out of the apartments safely, Rojas and his family began putting necessities into a large trash bag.

"We grabbed some clothes and important documents and I walked out to see my cousin with a rope," Rojas said

As the water continued to rise, Diaz managed to find rope in the bed of a truck nearby.

"We tied it off at the stairs that went down to the parking lot and I jumped in with the other end of the rope," Diaz explained "Ovil stayed by the stairs keeping the rope tight as I went across."

It didn't take long before the family began making

their way across, using the rope to pull themselves through the frigid water.

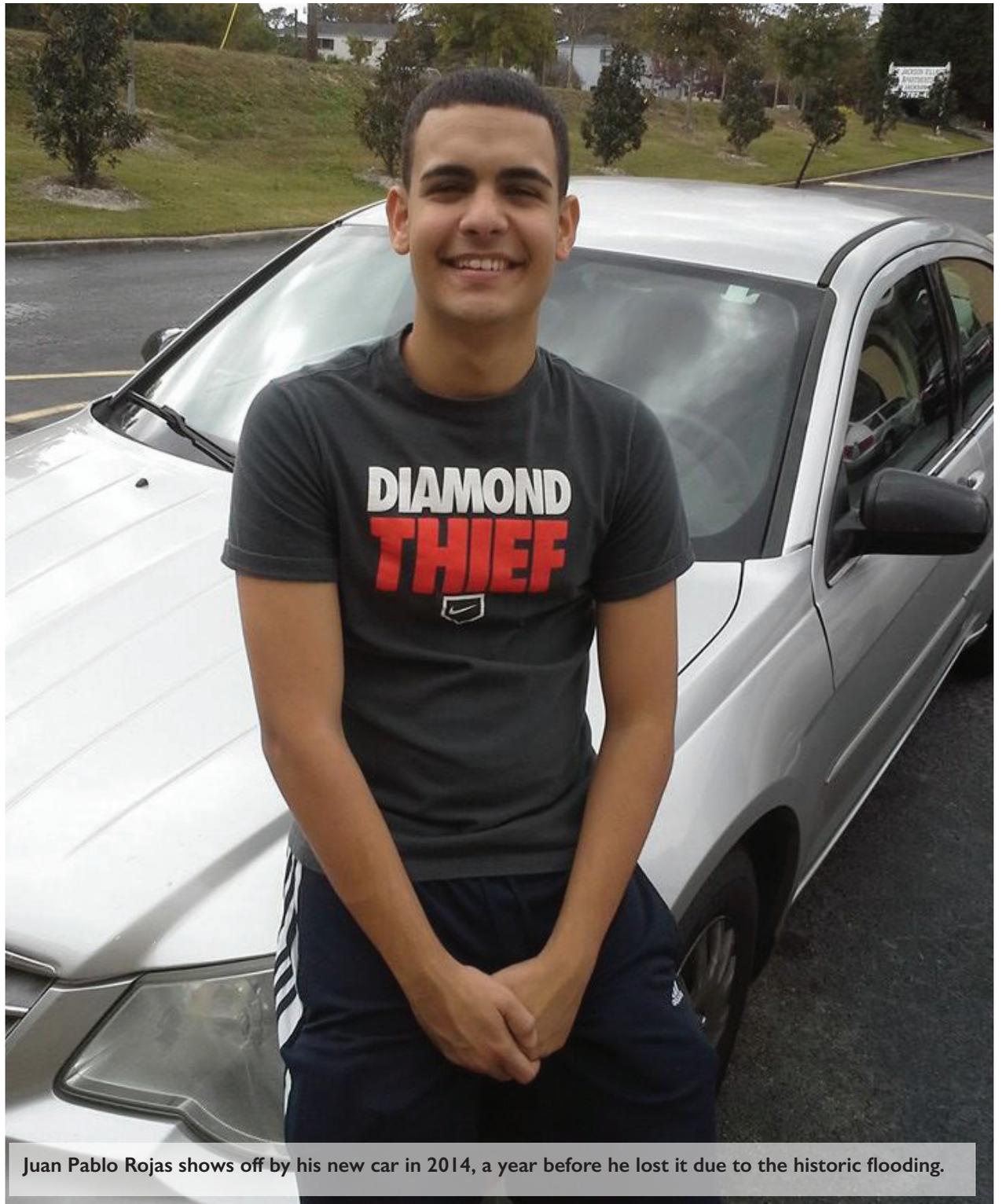
"I had my mom on my back," Rojas said. "We got in the water and my mom was screaming. She couldn't even move because of the low temperature of the water. She was holding me tight and all I could think of was getting her out of there and I was pulling the rope as hard and fast as I could."

Rojas and his family made it out safely, and took refuge at his aunt's house.

"We were very lucky and were able to get in and get everyone out in a very timely manner," Diaz said. "I have all the respect in the world for the search and rescue teams that were very busy that day."

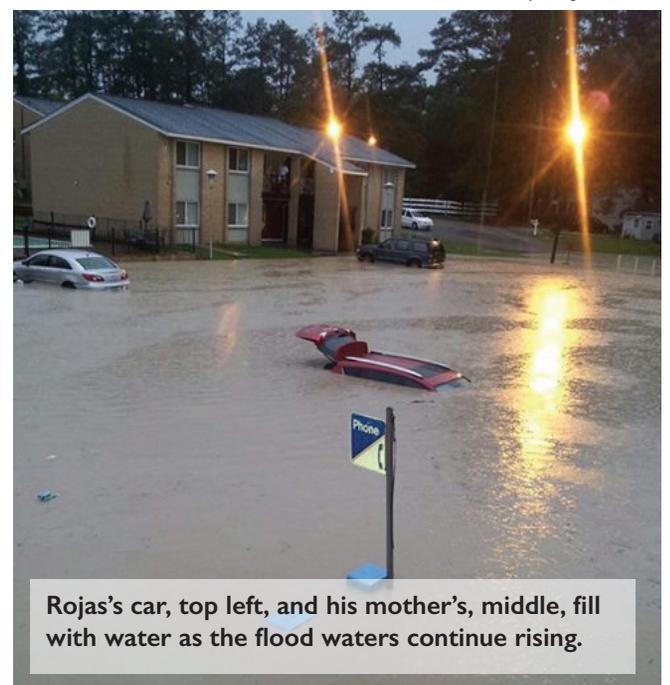
To his family, both Diaz and Valdes were heroes that day. While Rojas only lost his car, he is lucky that the floodwaters never reached the second floor, leaving their apartment untouched.

"It affected me a lot because I lost my car so it's harder for me to find a job," said Rojas. "But we made it out alive which is what really matters."



Juan Pablo Rojas shows off by his new car in 2014, a year before he lost it due to the historic flooding.

Courtesy of Angelina Alfonso



Rojas's car, top left, and his mother's, middle, fill with water as the flood waters continue rising.

Courtesy of Roberto Robles