

Jo Anna Cantú

Nurse Practitioner
South Laredo Family Clinic
Born: Laredo, Texas

“The qualities of caring, nurturing and thoughtfulness shown by my family and my mentors have shaped who I have become both professionally and personally.”

Joanna Cantú grew up in a household that valued education. Since her parents did not have a formal college education, their goal was to provide their children with the opportunity to attend college. Her parents’ goal became a reality when she and her three siblings all received university degrees. The love and encouragement given by both her immediate and extended family helped provide the foundation for the vocation that Joanna would undertake.

Joanna has always been enthralled with healthcare. She once dreamed of attending medical school. However, her focus shifted to nursing when her grandmother was hospitalized. The care and compassion shown by the nurses impacted her deeply and changed forever her career plans. After receiving her undergraduate degree at Texas A&M University, she attended TAMIU where she received her nursing degree. Encouragement from TAMIU faculty inspired her to continue her education further and she attained her master’s degree in Nursing from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. Joanna now cares for a population of patients that is predominantly Hispanic.

Adriana Arce

Reporter
KGNS-TV
Born: Laredo, Texas

“I know two languages, two cultures, and when people comment that Laredo is a closed-minded community, I’m the first to say it’s quite the opposite.”

As Adriana Arce’s career developed from newspaper to television, she has learned that being from Laredo has given her a unique perspective on many of the issues about which she reports. She sees first-hand the people who struggle and work to get a little piece of the American dream. Many are illegal immigrants, some even criminals, but “most are just like you and me... working hard to make a life a little better than our parents who struggled before us.”

A graduate of TAMIU, she did not pursue a degree in journalism. At one point she believed that not leaving Laredo after graduating from college was a mistake. She now realizes that remaining in her native city has given her opportunities she may have been denied somewhere else. That attitude, coupled with her mother’s encouragement, has placed her in a position doing what she loves.

Now a television reporter, she says, “Telling the stories of the people here on our border, exposing our problems and trying to find solutions to them is what I enjoy. If with my work I can make just a small contribution to this Hispanic community...then I think I’ve done my job.”

Agustín Dovalina, III

Chief of Police
City of Laredo
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Service above self.”

For almost 30 years, Agustín Dovalina, III has made it his mission to keep the citizens of Laredo safe and secure. What is a highly decorated career in law enforcement began with almost 20 years as a police officer. Dovalina then pursued his degree in Criminal Justice at TAMIU, receiving his diploma the same year he was named interim Chief of Police of the City of Laredo.

Education has played an integral part of Dovalina’s success. In 1994, he attended the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s National Academy, being the first Laredo police officer in history to do so. Not content with his bachelor’s degree, he followed with a Masters of Science in Criminal Justice at TAMIU. He is also a graduate of the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government’s State and Local Executives Program. He has been awarded numerous honors.

Arturo Sánchez, III

Manager of Workforce Development
Texas Instruments Incorporated
Born: Houston, Texas

“I learned lifelong skills at TAMIU.”

In 1994, a traumatic head-on collision forced Arturo Sánchez, III to learn to walk again. A year spent in physical therapy provided him time to focus on his goals. One of them was to finish his degree in business. Sánchez pursued his education with the same zeal he put into his physical rehabilitation.

Before graduating from TAMIU, he learned that he had been accepted to the George Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. It was there that he was inspired by the President’s words, “Public service is a noble calling, and we need men and women of character to believe in their communities, in their states, and in their country.”

In 2001, an internship prior to graduation opened doors to a permanent position at NASA. After several years at NASA, Sánchez recently accepted a position at Texas Instruments, Inc. He quotes a graduate school professor who once told him, “There are not enough “Z” names (Sánchez, Hernández, Rodríguez, Gómez) in the workforce. You’ll have to push yourself every day to ensure your reputation paves the way for others.”

Anissa Romo-Quesada

Teacher
St. Augustine High School
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Laredo has so much to offer. We are fortunate to have a culture unlike any other, richer than any other.”

Although financial difficulties kept Quesada from leaving Laredo to attend college, she managed to get her degree while working three jobs. This experience firmly ingrained in her the value of education. Her love for her native city also drives her to make a difference in the lives not only of the students she teaches, but also in the community.

She has dedicated her career as an educator at L. J. Christen Middle School and now at St. Augustine. Her degrees from TAMIU helped her to challenge her students and make them into life-long learners.

Growing up in a large, Catholic, Hispanic family was an adventure for Quesada. Her mother's influence has played a large role in her development. She says her mother “expected us to be the best and be true to ourselves.” It is this influence that inspires her to bring out the best in her students.

Calixto Seca, Jr.

Binational Coordinator for Public Health
Department of State Health Services
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Education is the best inheritance a parent can give a child.”

For Calixto Seca, Jr., moving across the border from Nuevo Laredo to Laredo after completing ninth grade proved to be a humbling experience. Because he had only been educated in Spanish, the educational system placed him in third grade so he could gain a basic mastery of the English language for a semester before allowing him to go to high school. With the encouragement and support of many teachers, Seca graduated from high school as a member of National Honor Society.

After a few personal setbacks, Seca was determined to earn his degree at TAMIU and paid for his tuition by working at the hotel run by his family in Nuevo Laredo. After graduation in 1988, he continued to work in the family business until the Mexican economic crisis in 1991. He then started his public health career, which has led him to his current position as Binational Coordinator for Public Health.

Dr. Laura Cruz Garza

Professor
Texas A&M University-Kingsville
Born: Laredo, Texas

“I would advise young Hispanic individuals to never feel ashamed of their heritage.”

“Ganas” is a Spanish word that is used to describe the desire to achieve. Laura Cruz Garza used those “ganas” to overcome many obstacles in her life that many would have seen as a barrier to achieving higher education. One of these was racial discrimination, which she experienced while pursuing her Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology. Growing up in Laredo, she was never exposed to issues of racial diversity. Once outside her beloved hometown, however, she found discrimination against Mexicans still existed.

Not one to let negative attitudes get in her way, Cruz Garza worked to further her education and “achieve the impossible”. That is what was instilled in her by her parents. Her love of education is reflected in her teaching. She was named as one of the Outstanding Hispanic Faculty at Texas A&M-Kingsville, received a fellowship from the Teaching Effectiveness and Career Enhancement Program, and was awarded the Outstanding Professor Award from Pi Beta Phi.

Cruz Garza has achieved much since earning her bachelor’s degree at TAMIU, but she always remains humble. Her father taught her to be proud of who she was and where she came from.

Elia Myers-Juárez

Director of Federal / State Comp. Programs
United Independent School District
Born: Laredo, Texas

“My mother is my hero. She always inculcated that education was the key to success and that it was the best gift because it would last a lifetime, define my life and make me who I am.”

Elia Myers-Juárez will always be grateful to her parents for the most wonderful gift they could give her, an education. One wonders if it is coincidence that watching her parents sacrifice and save to send her to college has not influenced her career aspirations. Now as the Director of Federal and State Compensatory Programs for the United Independent School District, she works in a department whose mission is to provide the financial resources and guidance to campuses that will in turn provide each of their students the essential academic skills needed to achieve success.

Myers-Juárez tells how her parents had only a third and fourth grade education, but longed for their daughter to go to college. A degree would be something that no one could ever take from her and would enable her to be successful no matter what happened in her life. Myers-Juárez has dedicated 33 years of her life to education and could not imagine doing anything different.

Eduardo Medina, Jr.

Owner and President
Apple Bee Learning Center
Born: Laredo, Texas

“As a child, I never realized I was poor.”

As the oldest of five children who grew up in the barrio of “El Santo Niño”, Medina loved school and worked hard because he did not want to live there for the rest of his life.

Education was Medina’s ticket to a better life. Since receiving his degree in 1985, he is the first one in his immediate family to have graduated from college.

After teaching for 11 years, Medina gravitated towards business and opened his own tutoring and day care center. He also runs his own construction company and only recently has gone into ranching.

An avid believer in learning, he has turned to experts in different areas to serve as mentors. Persistence, vision, and extreme optimism are but a few of the traits he believes have helped him become successful.

Estella Rodríguez

Attorney
Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Be patient when life gets in the way of your goals and don’t lose sight of them.”

Estella Rodríguez has always been driven to see justice be done. As a child, her mother called her “la abogada” because she was always questioning her mother and wanting justification for her actions. In her first career, she was a journalist who wrote to help those in need, educate the public and be part of the checks and balances of government. Now, as an attorney, she works to champion justice and provide legal assistance to those who otherwise could not afford the services.

Rodríguez’ educational journey has been a long one, with many detours along the way that did not prevent her from receiving a law degree in 2005. Although she graduated with honors and in the top ten percent of her high school class, her dream of attending college would be cut short by the reality of having to work to contribute to the family income. After working with Southwestern Bell for several years, she changed careers to become a writer and eventually became managing editor of the *Laredo Morning Times*. It was during these years that she returned to college and received a bachelor’s degree.

Surrounded by family, friends, and countless mentors, Rodríguez accomplished her goal of becoming an attorney. She had to make many sacrifices to get to where she is, but she looks upon those times of adversity as a learning opportunity.

Eugenio Garza, Jr.

Port Director of Homeland Security
U. S. Customs and Border Protection
Born: Sullivan City, Texas

*“When I look back on the long nights and weekends that I spent studying,
I realize that the time is worth its weight in gold.”*

Eugenio Garza, Jr. knows that personal experience can be a great teacher. His father had been employed by an oil and gas company that moved to Oklahoma and was forced to take an early retirement. With a household of eleven, his father struggled to make ends meet and the family went north to work as migrant farm workers. It was not an easy life, but this experience gave Garza the motivation to finish high school and attend college.

Inspired by the Border Patrol officers he observed as a farm worker, his dream was to become a police officer. He was drafted by the United States Army, and later entered the Air Force. It was there that he was given an opportunity to receive the training as a military policeman to fulfill his life's dream. With encouragement from his family, especially his father, he rose through the ranks. He then pursued his degree in Criminal Justice and landed the post he fills today. A believer in lifelong learning, Garza is now pursuing his Masters of Science in Criminal Justice.

Gerardo Flores

Chief Nursing Officer
South Texas Regional Medical Center
Born: Laredo, Texas

*“Identify the tools you need to manage life.
Commit to learning, plan to serve, and then execute the plan.”*

Gerardo Flores is a believer in second chances. He knows that strong lessons can be learned from defeat and is grateful for the opportunities that come from those lessons.

At 18, Flores chose to drop out of high school to pursue financial independence in a career in the restaurant industry. The economic conditions of the 1970's in Laredo altered his progress and he found himself at a crossroads in his life. While being treated in the emergency room, it dawned on him that nursing was a career in demand and a job that was secure. He was motivated to obtain his GED and pursue several degrees in nursing, culminating with a Master of Science in Nursing, Health Care Administration. The formal education he so easily dismissed in his youth, he now considers precious.

Flores' education was strengthened at home where his parents supported him unconditionally.

Gerald Schwebel

Executive Vice President
International Bank of Commerce
Born: México City, México

“To succeed, be patient. Be a sponge and soak up as much knowledge as possible.”

As a child, Gerald Schwebel made the decision to live with his grandmother, who was recruited to come to the United States due to a shortage of nurses in the 1940's. Growing up on both sides of the border proved to be a powerful advantage for him as he learned two languages and two cultures. These experiences have proved to be extremely beneficial in his professional life. Discipline, coupled with hard work, has proven to be the basis of his success.

Schwebel's inspiration for education came from his grandmother whose education in México proved to be her greatest asset in the United States. He earned his undergraduate degree at Texas A&I University of Laredo (now Texas A&M International University) and has completed graduate work in the fields of International Trade and Banking at TAMIU, the University of Texas, Texas A&M University and the Stonier Graduate School of Banking at the University of Delaware.

Schwebel is considered one of America's leading experts on international trade and finance, and often represents IBC and its customers in consultation with top government and business leaders in the U.S., México and Canada. He directs the Bank's international program, and has been called upon on numerous occasions to testify before Congress on issues of U.S./México trade, including the North American Free Trade Agreement—NAFTA.

Dr. Henry Cuellar

Congressman, District 28
U. S. House of Representatives
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Texans prove every day they're willing to work hard, make sacrifices for their children, and reach for a better life.”

Congressman Henry Cuellar credits education as the single most important tool in building a productive and successful life. He began his higher education by earning an associate's degree from Laredo Community College. The skills and confidence he gained there enabled him to take the next step to Washington, D.C. While there, he washed dishes and held down other jobs as he earned a Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Service from Georgetown University where he graduated *cum laude*. Soon after graduation, Congressman Cuellar returned to Texas to earn degrees in International Trade at Texas A&M International University, a law degree from the University of Texas-Austin and a Ph.D. in Government from UT-Austin. Today, he is the most degreed Congressman serving in the House with five advanced degrees.

As Laredo's former State Representative, Congressman Cuellar was a statewide influential legislator who served in leadership positions in the most powerful House committees – the House Appropriations, Higher Education and Calendars committees. Congressman Cuellar's top priorities continue to include improving education, increasing access to affordable healthcare and prescription drugs, and bringing better jobs and wages to Texas.

The son of migrant workers, Congressman Cuellar has worked tirelessly and dedicated his life to public service to improve the community and state in which he lives. He continues to honor the hard work of Texans with some of his own — fighting to keep the doors of opportunity open for anyone willing to study hard and work hard.

Henry P. Flores

County Clerk (Retired)
County of Webb
Born: Laredo, Texas

“You are more than a human being, you are a human becoming.”

Politics was in Henry Flores’ blood. When two uncles were candidates for county elected offices and family volunteered with their campaigns, Flores got hooked at an early age. For 24 years, he served Laredo as the County Clerk until his retirement. Flores cites his parents’ Mexican heritage and their American mindset as an influence to participate actively in the world around him and be a seeker of truth, justice, and happiness.

Flores’ upbringing in Laredo is a source of pride for him. He feels the confluence of cultures in this town should serve as an example for the world. An avid supporter of the alma mater that helped prepare him for life, he believed that “this downtown boy can start here and go anywhere.” He is a life-long learner.

René Solís

Executive Vice President
BBVA Laredo National Bank
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Set your goals early and then work hard to achieve them.”

René Solís has been following his beliefs since he was nine years old when he sold newspapers in downtown Laredo to earn money to buy Levi’s jeans. His parents, hardworking immigrants from México, could not afford to give such luxuries to their son, the youngest of their eight children.

When Solís began working at Joe Brand at 16 years old, he found himself in the company of people who would become mentors and shape his life and work ethic. He received his bachelor’s degree in 1971 and soon thereafter began his career in banking. Over the years, he has moved up the career ladder and now holds the title of executive vice president.

Irene Rosales

Director of Student Health
United Independent School District
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Do not listen to negative people.”

Watching the nurse who made monthly visits to her childhood home was what inspired Irene Rosales to make it her life’s mission to become a registered nurse and be able to help others feel better. This was a lofty goal for this first-grade girl who grew up in the barrio where the odds of success were against her.

Rosales was taunted by those around her for being poor, for the way her family lived, and for having a stuttering speech impediment. Little emphasis was paid to her education and she frequently missed school to care for her younger siblings, sometimes for months at a time. A teacher once told her to go home because she would never be able to learn. In high school, a counselor advised her to change her career plans because she did not have what it took to be nurse. So she did, and for 14 years worked as a laboratory technician.

The encouragement from her mother-in-law finally motivated her to work towards her nursing degree. Support from her family and husband provided the moral support to seek a BSN, which she completed in 2004.

Rick Flores

Sheriff
County of Webb
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Nothing in life comes easy and anything in life worth having can only be attained through hard work.”

His father only had a fifth grade education, but Rick Flores says his father had a Ph.D. – one in the study of life. His father instilled in him the value of a disciplined work ethic.

From managing an extensive paper route, to mowing lawns and picking crops as a young man, Flores knows about hard work. The desire to seek employment immediately rather than enjoy the benefits of an education led to his decision to drop out of high school his senior year. In retrospect, Flores realizes that continuing his education at that time would have been the easier road to take. He now holds a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice and a Master of Arts in Sociology from TAMU. He is working towards a graduate degree in public administration.

Even with a long list of accolades and accomplishments, Sheriff Flores remembers his father’s words, “Never forget to keep your feet on the ground and never forget where you come from.” Through his efforts these past two years, Flores’ goal as Sheriff has been to protect the citizens of Webb County.

Rodney R. Lewis

Chief Executive Officer
Lewis Petro Properties, Inc.
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Do what you feel in your gut that is right to do for you. Listen to others’ opinions, form your own, and then do what you think is right for you.”

Dedication to working long, hard hours and a willingness to learn are characteristics that define Rodney R. Lewis. While his career path started with his degree in criminal justice, it took a permanent detour into the oil and gas industry. Initially, he worked for several oil and gas companies, and in 1983 he founded his own company, Lewis Petro Properties.

Lewis shares a love for the land and the sky, influenced by his grandfather who was a rancher and his father who was an Air Force pilot. Although their vocations were polar opposites, the lessons they taught him were the same. Hard work, preparation and a drive to be the best in whatever you choose to do were ideals impressed upon Lewis.

Romeo Rodríguez, Jr.

Superintendent
Zapata County Independent School District
Born: Laredo, Texas

“The lessons learned from the fear of failure and the belief that we are not worthy can be most destructive.”

Romeo Rodríguez, Jr. lives his life by a simple creed: “Care to do the best in the service of others.” These words guide his daily activities in both family and professional life. As a child, he dreamed of attending Catholic school, which was never possible. His passion for education has continued to grow since then.

Rodríguez credits Vidal M. Treviño, a former superintendent of the Laredo Independent School District, with predicting his career path. His own qualities of humility and having a “firm, but fair heart” have proved beneficial in achieving his goals. Since undertaking the development of the Learning Assistance Program in 1978, Rodríguez has championed the right to quality education in the Laredo and surrounding areas.

His commitment to a variety of organizations in areas that support education and youth development has been unwavering. That is why he strives to promote a positive environment that is conducive to education and the future success of all students.

Leticia Morán

Director of Field Operations
U. S. Customs and Border Protection
Born: Laredo, Texas

“I realize that distance could never sever the strong ties I had with my family.”

Being the youngest of nine children, Leticia Morán grew up with the influence of those older than her. Even while in elementary school, her family’s respect for President John F. Kennedy and the ideals of public service that he championed helped direct her in choosing her vocation. While in college, her father warned her to “learn to do more than one thing! Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.”

Heeding her father’s advice, Morán majored in both history and government and earned her bachelor’s degree. She took a job with the U.S. Customs Service soon after graduation. The desire to be of service, a trait learned as a child helping with housework after her mother passed away, was a lesson that provided her with the demeanor to take on new tasks.

Her love of family and desire to be near them and the culture in which she was raised kept her from broadening her horizons. However, the call to public service at a higher level was strong enough to persuade her to leave her hometown. Now she realizes that even away nothing can break her ties to her family and Laredo.

Margarita Cásarez

Director of ICU
Laredo Medical Center
Born: San Bernardino, California

“If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.”

Margarita Cásarez made her decision to become a nurse at six years of age. She was raised by a single mother who went to nursing school and trained with the Sisters of Mercy. Even though she was very young, she knows this career path was her destiny. Today, she still firmly believes that the choices that are made early in life influence the paths we create for the future.

Cásarez earned two nursing degrees prior to receiving her bachelor’s degree in nursing at TAMIU and is currently working towards her master’s in the same discipline. Her career began at Mercy Hospital, first in the telemetry unit and then in the emergency room. These two opportunities gave her the experience needed for her current role as the director of the intensive care unit at Laredo Medical Center.

Through the example of her mother, Cásarez has learned that education is the strongest weapon a person has to succeed.

Ma. de Lourdes C. Sánchez

Vice President/Controller
G. L. Properties, Inc.
Born: México City, México

*“All you need to do is want to improve and you will succeed.
Do not dwell on misfortunes. Concentrate on how you can improve your life.”*

María de Lourdes C. Sánchez has a no-nonsense approach to success. As the oldest daughter to a single mother with six children, she assumed the household duties while her mother worked two or three jobs to support them. Life was very hard for this girl who had to grow up fast.

Sánchez never felt sorry for herself. Whenever one of her siblings expressed any discontent with their poor lifestyle, her mother would tell them that if they did not want to live such a life, they must apply themselves in school and get a college education. Thus, Sánchez has learned razor-sharp focus on achieving the task at hand. This focus is what has helped her build her business.

Taking advantage of the University that was being established in Laredo, she worked while putting herself through school. Even though she graduated almost thirty years ago, she continues to glean lessons from life and shares her insight with others. “Learn and pass it on to others so that you can learn other things to better yourself.”

Michael Cortéz

General Manager
Sames Motor Company
Born: Laredo, Texas

“If you are truthful to yourself, your peers and to God, you will be rewarded.”

Mike Cortéz is living proof of this belief which has guided his career at the Sames Motor Company from the payroll department when he was a college senior to his present role as General Manager.

Cortéz credits his father with being a profound influence in his life, teaching him valuable lessons on honesty, respect, success, and family. Cortéz’ family moved quite often, following his father’s assignments in the United States Air Force. No matter what city or country the family was in, Cortéz’ parents celebrated their Hispanic heritage and shared that with their children.

Cortéz has been profoundly impacted by the guidance of his mentor, Hank Sames. He has instilled in him a deep respect for others, to keep his feet on the ground, and also to give back to the community. This includes assisting his alma mater with its annual Mariachi Festival and the TAMIU AutMusFest Committee.

Miguel A. Conchas

President and Chief Executive Officer
Laredo Chamber of Commerce
Born: Nuevo Laredo, México

“Find a job you like, and you’ll never have to work a day in your life.”

The words of Miguel A. Conchas’ father, “Hijo, la educación y tu palabra son cosas que nadie en este mundo te puede quitar,” still echo in his head as if they had been uttered yesterday. His father’s advice that education and being true to your word are things that no one can take from you has impacted Conchas deeply. His mother was determined that her children attend schools in the U.S., but not knowing English proved difficult and did not make school an enjoyable experience. Because of his personal experience, Conchas is a firm believer in a structured bilingual education program.

Knowing the value of higher education, he earned a bachelor’s degree which he followed with a master’s degree from TAMIU. He then began a career in management and his professional life was guided by the wisdom of several mentors.

His love of this city has also influenced his career. In 1986, he was named director of the Laredo Convention and Visitors Bureau and, in 1992, he took the helm of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce. While at the Chamber, he was invited to participate in a group that met with then Vice President Al Gore to promote the enactment of NAFTA.

Mario A. Peña

Terminal Manager
FedEx National LTL
Born: Laredo, Texas

*“Think big; don’t settle for less than what you really want.
Everything is possible once you set your mind to it.”*

Mario Peña was an only child who learned the meaning of unconditional love from his parents who were totally devoted to each other and were willing to make sacrifices for him. He credits them for giving him strong moral standards and values that have helped him succeed him as a family man as well as professionally. His father’s “consejos” are still alive in his mind and heart.

Over the years, Mario has given back to his community in many ways. Two organizations he has dedicated himself to are the United Way and TAMIU. He was a staunch advocate of Laredo State University’s proposed inclusion into the Texas A&M University System. He testified before the Board of Regents and later served as a founding member of the board of directors for the TAMIU Alumni Association.

His career beginnings were in sales and marketing, but he has since moved into the shipping industry.

Peña credits his teachers with teaching him the importance of good communication. This has served him well in his career. However, he also thanks his parents who taught him the value of *honesty and integrity*.

Dr. Norma Cantú

Professor
University of Texas at San Antonio
Born: Nuevo Laredo, México

“The lessons learned from my parents have shaped not only my intellect but my character.”

Norma Cantú is the oldest of 11 children born to a Tejana mother from Corpus Christi and a Mexican father. The discernment of right and wrong, the potential for achievement, a strong work ethic, and the value of education are but some of the ideas instilled by family that provide inspiration to her.

It was a difficult decision to drop out of college at one point due to financial difficulties in her family. At the time, it was the only option. Her determination and persistence led her back to finish her degree and eventually pursue her doctorate degree. She credits several mentors, including family and professors at different universities, for providing guidance and encouragement that would lead to her success.

Cantú's fictionalized memoir, “Canícula: Snapshots of a Girl En La Frontera” chronicles her coming of age in the U.S.-México border towns of Laredo and Nuevo Laredo during the fifties and sixties. This touching and powerful account of growing up in South Texas earned Cantú the prestigious Premio Aztlán Literary Prize in 1995. The Premio Aztlán is a national literary award established to encourage and reward emerging Chicana and Chicano authors.

Dr. Cecilia Moreno

Superintendent, Carrizo Springs
Consolidated Independent School District
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Persistence, when it benefits others, is the best persistence.”

At “sweet sixteen”, many girls are planning a party and dreaming of a night filled with fun and memories. At sixteen, with her parent's blessing but no one to take her, Dr. Cecilia Moreno made the uncharted trip to north Texas to begin her first semester in college at Texas Woman's University. That bus trip began a life-long journey into higher education. By the time she was 19, she was already fully certified by the state as a high school teacher.

Moreno credits her loving husband with providing much support for her educational endeavors, which have included receiving her MBA in accounting, review courses to prepare for the CPA exam, and her doctorate. With parents who only received an elementary level education due to sacrifices they needed to make for their families, Moreno truly values the opportunities she has been given. An educator for 41 years, her belief in the pursuit of higher education makes her work to encourage students to do their best. She also works to inspire educational professionals to push the limits of learning in their classrooms.

Erasmo A. Villarreal

Director of the Laredo Building Department
City of Laredo
Born: Laredo, Texas

“I believe one of the qualities that has been most influential in my life and career was compassion for others.”

“As a child, I enjoyed going to the ranch with my father who taught me to appreciate nature and to respect and care for our environment.” Both Erasmo Villarreal’s parents were teachers who inspired their children to do their best and trust in the Lord for guidance.

These two core beliefs were instrumental in all his professional endeavors. Compassion for others was another important quality that he learned to live by. Whether it was with job training, securing employment, providing statistical data to businesses, or creating affordable housing for low to moderate income families, he has worked to improve the quality of life through community development.

Villarreal also had a business mentor who provided encouragement and guidance in seeking career advancement. He learned from him that experience cannot be taught, it has to be lived.

Annette Segovia

RN, Pediatric Manager
Doctors Hospital of Laredo
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Being raised in a large family taught me the importance of teamwork and collaboration. My parents insisted that we always work together and support one another.”

A loving and caring environment is what inspired Annette Segovia to pursue a career in nursing. Her father is a big influence in the development of her personal and professional values. He motivated her to pursue lifelong education.

While she strives to succeed in all she does, she has also learned humility. Like with all doers, mistakes are made; she feels it is more important to recognize the error, correct it and most important learn from it.

Her mentor and friend taught her to assist others in reaching their highest potential. Segovia encourages young people entering the profession to know themselves, their values, their beliefs and to search for a mentor who will help them excel.

Héctor A. Herrera

Vice President and Director
ExxonMobil Inter-America
Born: Nuevo Laredo, México

“I have certainly lived through failures and defeats as much as successes in my life, and probably have enjoyed more the times that I had to get up from being down than the sweet victories.”

At the young age of 15, his first summer job was cleaning at a gasoline station. Héctor A. Herrera could not have foreseen that this modest entry into the petroleum industry would eventually lead him to the position he holds today.

The greatest lesson he learned was that if he worked hard at whatever he did, he would succeed. Herrera’s no-nonsense approach to success was taught to him by his father, “Get things done, give everything you’ve got and earn your keep.” A positive, “never-quit” attitude was also inspired by his coaches who gave him a passion for every task he undertook.

Herrera takes pride in the fact that he did not know a word of English until sixth grade in elementary school, where the principal continuously supported him in his mastery of the language. Herrera also credits his mastery of his native tongue and understanding of his culture to opening doors for him in both professional and personal endeavors. His determined optimism is evident in his approach to life.

NEW NEW NEW

Ana N. Ochoa

Real Estate Broker/President/Owner
Ana Ochoa & Company
Born: Havana, Cuba

“Life is what happens while we’re waiting for life to happen.”

As much as one hopes to have a modicum of control over our lives, events can take place that change one’s life forever. Ochoa has had her share of tearful farewells. In 1960, Ana and her three siblings, including a twin sister, were sent to live with relatives in the U.S. after Fidel Castro assumed control of Cuba. Her parents were to follow as soon as they could close her father’s law practice and put things in order. But Ochoa was yet to live the hardest farewell, her eldest daughter’s death after years of struggling with cancer.

Ochoa learned from her parents the quality of silent strength. She learned to keep on going, never complaining, and moving forward with integrity and a willingness to work. Whether in her duties as a mother and wife, a political activist, and Board of Trustee Member for Laredo Community College, she was dedicated. Due to life changes, it took her 12 years to complete her degree. The independence her education gave her, coupled with hard work, brought this single mother to the successful place she is today.

Armando Soto, Jr.

CPA
Armando Soto CPA CFP
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Life is a roller coaster filled with ups and downs.”

Armando Soto, Jr. is no stranger to adversity. Born to Mexican immigrant parents who only had an elementary education, he learned from their struggles how to make a better future for himself. His parents' education did not fully prepare them for the complications of running a business, but their dedication, desire and an incredible will enabled them to succeed. Soto believes in developing a plan of action and committing it to paper. In this manner, he has a constant reminder of what needs to be accomplished.

He grew up in the “El Chacon” barrio living within a two block radius of “tias” and “tios.” He discovered at a young age that he would rather work in the family business after school than be playing out in the neighborhood with cousins and friends, even though that was more fun.

His experiences taught him that honesty is an important virtue, and although at times he is accused of “being too honest”, it is a trait that he admires in people.

Carlos Luna

Coordinator of Bands, Laredo Independent School District
Band Director, J.W. Nixon High School
Born: Three Rivers, Texas

“The discipline and desire to succeed that my father taught us is the most important quality that I possess.”

While working with his father on the family farm, Carlos Luna learned a work ethic that did not just apply to harvesting crops. He learned the meaning of personal sacrifice for a cause greater than himself, and he applies to his students today.

When he was a junior in high school, his father was in an accident that rendered him bedridden. Being the oldest, Luna missed school in order to work the farm and tend to the livestock. Because he put the needs of his family ahead of his own educational pursuits, his parents rewarded him with financial assistance for college.

His love of music led him to pursue an undergraduate degree in music, but it was his desire to bring awareness to the importance of music education that led him to pursue his master's at TAMIU. The patience and determination he learned as a young man when he planted, cultivated, and harvested crops is now applied in planting the love of music in his students, cultivating their talent, and harvesting the bounty of the melodies they make under his direction.

Luna's strong advocacy in music education has earned him respect and praise among music educators across the state.

Christine A. Treviño

Founding Board Member/President
Communities in Schools of Laredo
Born: Galveston, Texas

“An education gives you independence, power and a strong knowledge that can help guide you.”

Growing up in Galveston in the 1950's was a difficult time. Discrimination against Latinos was common. After completing high school, Treviño was advised by her guidance counselor that she should become a beautician. She had other aspirations – she wanted to be a teacher. She fulfilled her dream by completing her degree long after she finished high school, married, and had three children. Her role model had been her mother who had gone through a similar process in acquiring her education.

Today she champions the rights of all children to receive quality education and have decisions made that are in their best interest.

She credits her family's tenacity, perseverance, strong work ethic, honesty and pride for shaping who she is today.

Elizabeth Martínez

Assistant Public Defender
County of Webb
Born: Laredo, Texas

“To whom much is given, much is also expected.”

This phrase was strongly impressed in her daughter by the late Amelia Nora Martínez. As the youngest of five siblings whose parents made many sacrifices to ensure their children had a quality education, she learned to pursue excellence in all she does. She is an advocate of education and often speaks to local youth emphasizing the need to persevere and seek higher education. She advises the youth, “If your desire is strong enough, nothing will be able to stop you from achieving your goals.”

Not one to let obstacles stand in her way, Martínez says that the desire to make her family proud keeps her focused. The desire to honor her mother's memory through her achievements is her way of expressing gratitude for all she has been given.

Gerardo “Jerry” A. Garza

Commissioner
Precinct 3, Webb County
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Haz el bien y no te fijes a quien.”

This “dicho,” engraved in Jerry Garza’s mind by his grandfather, guides his daily life. He finds it more important to cultivate relationships with as many people as he can than to have superficial interactions.

Born in a middle class home to hardworking parents with strong morals, values, and ideals Garza was provided the best lessons in faith, service, and education. Education was always a priority and his parents sacrificed a great deal to ensure he attain it.

He has always been service-minded and first became involved in politics when he served as President of the TAMIU Student Government Association. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Political Science in the hopes of one day holding an elected position in this democratic country.

Juan L. “Larry” Sánchez

News Anchor, KGNS-TV
PR Marketing Specialist, South Texas Workforce Development Board
Born: Laredo, Texas

“If it can go wrong, it will.”

Believing in Murphy’s Law, Sánchez had to be prepared for the unexpected. With his father’s multiple assignments in the U.S. Navy that took him to many places, including Africa and the Dominican Republic, he learned to be ready for anything.

At the age of five, he moved to Philadelphia with his family, speaking only Spanish. He quickly immersed in the English language in order to be accepted by his classmates. Not liking to be called “One” instead of Juan, he opted for his nickname of Larry.

When his father died at the age of 42, he left behind a wife and three children. Sánchez was forced to become the “man of the house” and take care of his siblings. He has learned to work hard for what he wants and accept challenges as opportunities. He is no stranger to having two or three jobs at one time, giving 100 percent to everything he does.

He strongly feels that a person has to work hard for the things he wants in life.

Rosalinda Botello

CPA, President
Botello & Howell, P.C.
Born: Laredo, Texas

“As first generation American, I am compelled to succeed.”

Although she was born in Laredo, Botello spent the early years of her childhood in Chicago. Even though the city was racially segregated, she found love and support in her close-knit family. The eldest of six children born of Mexican parents, she carried the burden of being a role model to her siblings. She accepted responsibility at a young age which taught her decision-making skills and a strong sense of commitment to excellence, traits she has carried throughout her academic and professional life.

A job opportunity in high school not only provided her with a mentor, but with the financial resources to seek a higher education. She treasured the opportunity afforded by her employer and was determined to make the most of it. When she graduated from then-Laredo State University, she made history by being one of the first three graduates in the accounting program. She then passed the CPA exam and began a career that has led to being president of her own firm.

Botello actively participates in many Laredo organizations. She volunteers her time to support organizations that help prepare and motivate future leaders, the same way her mentors encouraged her.

Jorge González

Executive Vice President
Falcon International Bank
Born: Laredo, Texas

“Life is funny; there is no set of instructions to follow.”

Although his parents did not have a formal education and both worked full-time, they were the best thing that happened to González. They taught him and his siblings to be honest and hardworking. Learning at a young age to treat others with respect influenced their decision to attend college and enter professions of service.

He also credits his preparation for life to his athletic experiences where he learned that hard work and diligence pay off. His basketball coach was instrumental in reinforcing the values learned at home. Today, González serves as a role model to his children and others. He has been blessed with the ability to help others because of his community involvement. Serving on the boards of different civic organizations has given him the opportunity to network with other influential members of the community and together have been able to make a difference in Laredo.

Orlando D. Navarro

Real Estate Administrator
B.P. Newman Investment Company
Born: Chicago, Illinois

“Rights are not given, but earned.”

Orlando Navarro dropped out of college during his sophomore year. After two years working with family in construction, he finished his college education. This was a hard-learned lesson for the son of a Mexican immigrant father and a mother whose own family had emigrated from Nicaragua. Their struggle to make a better life for themselves has inspired Navarro in his own endeavors.

After spending two years studying and playing baseball at Tarkio College in Missouri, Navarro returned to Laredo and received his degree in 1994. Since then, he has built his career in real estate. He is now active in many Laredo organizations, and serves as president of the TAMIU Alumni Association.

Rosalva Guerra

County Judge
County of Zapata
Born: Roma, Texas

“Nothing is going to keep me from achieving my goals.”

Rosalva Guerra is an example of a person who does not believe that where you come from determines who you will become. Her father was a “ranchero” and her mother a cleaning lady at a local motel, and they labored tirelessly to support their five children. Guerra learned her judicious decision-making at the early age of eight years, having to manage the household and her siblings while her parents were working.

Guerra had her first job at ten years old, working with her mother during the hot summer months at the hotel for \$5 a day. Her mother is her inspiration and she learned “to never feel tired...if she could do it, so could I.” A bride at 16 years of age, Guerra gave her address at commencement while she was seven months pregnant. While working at the local tax office, she committed herself to finishing her bachelor’s degree. Her only regret is not having the guidance or encouragement at home on the importance of education. Knowing the lack of education did not stop her mother for working hard to provide for her family, Guerra learned not to give up in her own life.

Alfredo Santos, IV

CEO
Santos Consulting International
Born: Laredo, Texas

“People become leaders because they experience life and learn from everything they do, including making mistakes.”

Since high school, Alfredo Santos, IV has felt concern for his fellow citizens and since that time, has been working to better the community with his participation in a variety of charitable and civic organizations. Santos had his goals firmly planted in mind when in his junior year of college, his father unexpectedly passed away. His plans for himself, his degree, and his future career in government were put to the side when he had to assume responsibilities for his family's many businesses.

But Santos knows that good things are worth waiting for and he eventually received his degree in political science. He credits his mentors with providing him encouragement and helping him achieve this milestone. He is now able to dedicate his time and talent to serving others.

Marcus Moreno

Owner
Allstate Marcus Moreno Insurance Agency, Inc.
Born: San Antonio, Texas

“When you hear something, you forget it; when you see something, you remember it; but not until you do it, will you understand it.”

At four years of age, Marcus Moreno saw his father leave to work like he usually did. But this was no ordinary day, because his father would never return. The lack of a father figure would impact Moreno deeply for many years. In grade school, he was constantly being picked on because he was the smallest, skinniest and most naïve. Not knowing he was dyslexic, he was labeled an underachiever and he rebelled. A physical education coach helped him change dramatically. He found his outlet: athletics.

He played baseball at various colleges, hoping to one day play professionally. But that day never came, and he was forced to make a career decision. He eventually decided to go into business for himself; a decision that today has him achieving Allstate's highest honor in five consecutive years. He has been elected by his peers to serve in the Texas Region Advisory Council and on the board of the Allstate National Advisory Board representing agents throughout the country.

Juanita C.Vela

Executive Director of Special Education
United Independent School District
Born: Laredo, Texas

As executive director for special education at United Independent School District, Juanita C. Vela spends her days ensuring the program provides services that her students really need.

For most of her professional career, Vela has been involved with the special education program. Although her first five years as a teacher were spent in a traditional classroom, she soon felt an affinity for the district's special education students. In 1977, she became an educational diagnostician and was later promoted to special education supervisor.

Vela was first a housewife and mother of two before she decided to enroll in college, a decision she wishes she had made earlier. Her biggest joy is knowing that she and one of her former classroom students have received the TAMIU Alumni Achievement Award.