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Katherine Gallegos served Los Lunas schools for 60 years

BY DEBORAH FOX
News-Bulletin Staff Writer
dfox@news-bulletin.com

Los LUNAS

Katherine Gallegos Elementary School was named after a woman who was much more than an educator.

Sam Morerod, the school's principal, said she has often been referred to as the "Mother Teresa of Los Lunas."

Katherine Gallegos made sure the local children from disadvantaged families had winter coats, food, clothes, Christmas gifts and school supplies, even if that meant purchasing them herself, which she often did.

Chester Skinner, the owner of Simon Neustadts, a local grocery and department store in Los Lunas, would give Gallegos "good prices on the coats," said Ruth Perea, Gallegos' youngest daughter.

"She could have been a rich woman, but she gave all her money away," Katherine D'Assis, Gallegos' granddaughter said. "If she saw someone in need, she helped."

Gallegos had four children, Julie Nesbit, her eldest daughter, Stephen Gallegos, Rosalie Douglas and Ruth Perea.

At 54-years old, Julie passed away from Leukemia. Rosalie married and moved to Arizona, and later earned her

degree in psychology.

Stephen earned his doctorate in psychology and created a visualization technique that he teaches in workshops around Europe and the United States.

Ruth is retired from the Los Lunas Post Office and also from the Los Lunas and Isleta Police Departments. She recently ran for office in Los Lunas.

"She was a wonderful mom. She taught me to read when I was 2-years old," Perea said. "Of course, she read to all of us."

"Her grandchildren are all artists and teachers — there's a lot of creativity in the family," said D'Assis.

Born in Las Vegas, N.M., Gallegos was of Irish and English descent. Her family moved to New Mexico from Kentucky before she was born.

Her paternal grandfather had bought land in Las Vegas, and his son, Stephen Powers, became the Las Vegas water department supervisor.

Her mother, Neville Pendleton, met Stephen in Kentucky. They had a large family.

When Katherine was 19-years old, she moved in with her sister, Ruth Tondre, in Los Lunas, who was married to the sheriff. That's when her career in education began.

"I believe she started out at a grade school in Los Lentos," Ruth recalls.



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Gallegos started teaching herself Spanish after moving to Los Lunas.

In 1927, she married Los Lunas resident Eligio Gallegos.

“She fell in love with her husband when she first saw him,” said Julie.

“She said he was the most handsome man she’d ever seen.”

He rode a white horse around Los Lunas. Horseback travel around the village was not uncommon in those days.

“How romantic,” croons great-granddaughter Jessica.

“He looked like Tyrone Power,” added Perea.

Theirs was the first Anglo-Hispanic marriage in Los Lunas, and they were married for almost 60 years.

Gallegos had a quirky sense of humor.

“Sometimes when she would answer the phone she’d say, ‘Hold on, I can’t hear you, let me get my glasses,’” said granddaughter Julie Eakin.

The school was built in 1990, and a

“Name the School” petition was given to staff, students and parents who chose “the exemplary educator in the Los Lunas schools,”

“He had trouble in school, he had trouble reading, and she would take him to the library and offer him an ice cream if he would read a book.”

KATHERINE D’ASSIS
Gallegos’s granddaughter

the school’s recorded history states.

When Gallegos gave a speech at the dedication ceremony of the new elementary school, she joked, “I thought you had to be dead to get such an honor.”

She served the Los Lunas school system for 60 years, teaching three genera-





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tions of village citizens and serving as director of instruction.

Gallegos was the superintendent of the district elementary schools when Paul Sanchez was a child having a hard time in school.

Gallegos had a positive and lasting impact on the young boy.

“He had trouble in school, he had trouble reading, and she would take him to the library and offer him an ice cream if he would read a book,” said D’Assis. “She helped him stay interested in school.”

Sanchez went on to become a teacher,

and even worked for the teacher’s union for a while.

“He’s very prominent in education circles,” said Douglas. “I think he still works in the National Education Association.”

“He is currently the executive director of the American Embassy Association in Ghana, West Africa,” said D’Assis.

“There were many people around Los Lunas that she mentored and encouraged to reach their full potential,” said Perea.



Submitted photo

KATHERINE GALLEGOS ELEMENTARY School in Los Lunas was named for the longtime educator. This photograph is of the Gallegos family, including Gregorio Gallegos, his brother, Eligio, who is holding his son, Stephen, and wife, Katherine.