

Additional Background on Laura Rodriguez

The Logan Heights Family Health Center has grown into a comprehensive health care facility servicing over 100,000 patient visits per year. The services provided include adult medicine, pediatrics, dental, optometry, speech and hearing and early intervention, x-ray, laboratory, a Healthcare for the Homeless project, and a health promotion department. Our specialty clinics include pediatric cardiology, ear, nose & throat, podiatry and dermatology.

The clinic now employs a staff of 160, and has an operating budget of approximately \$7 million. In 1987 the Laura Rodriguez Pediatric Clinic was opened, and 1989 saw the grand opening of a complete Women's Health Center facility.

The growth of the health center, without a doubt, has been aided by Laura Rodriguez. Now in her eighties, Laura opens the clinic every morning and sits by the door greeting our patients. At 9 a.m., Laura goes to the elementary school across the street and helps serve breakfast to the school children. When that task is completed, she is right back at the health center helping out in any way she is needed.

Laura is instrumental in making our bi-monthly Spirit of the Barrio fund-raising lunches successful. From cooking tamales, beans and rice in the kitchen to serving the guests and cleaning up afterward, Laura is there.

When asked what her goals for the future are, without hesitation she replied "to get that new medical clinic built". What she is referring to are the plans for a 9,000 sq. ft. facility to house Adult Medicine, a Dental Clinic and Operations. When built, this new wing will enable us to expand our services and increase the number of patient visits on a daily basis. But Laura didn't stop there. When that construction is complete, she wants to see an Urgent Care facility which would provide 24-hour emergency care for the Barrio Logan community. This would eliminate the need for our patients to be referred to a hospital emergency room.

Some additional awards and certificates Laura has received include the following:

- President Bush's Point of Light Award - October 23, 1991
- Channel 10 Leadership Award - January 4, 1991
- Recognized by Congressman Randy "Duke" Cunningham - November 1991
- Recognized by Governor Pete Wilson - October 1991
- Recognized by Assemblyman Pete Chacon - 1987

HISTORY: Founder, Board member - Logan Heights Family Health Center, Inc. (Chicano Community Health Center) full time employee, patient, advocate, pharmacist, factotum interpreter, etc., consultant and advisor to the Administrator and Medical Director.

COMMUNITY SERVICE: Social service (voluntary) and citizen advocate - Logan Heights - Barrio - 30 yr. - Lives with retired husband (gardner) in tiny home ½ block from Clinic. Her home and phone have been accessible to all who needed her advise and aid night and day.

LEADERSHIP:

1. Board member Mexican American Senior center 1975-1981
2. Board member Senior Citizens health center (4th Ave.) 1974-1978
3. Board member SDG&E consumer advisory panel 1978-1980
4. Member Housing Commission City of San Diego 1975-1981
5. Member Task Force on crime prevention and organized by Chief of Police Kollender and directed by Captain Walker S.E.S.D. 1980-1981
6. Board member of Chicano Federation 1970 - 1981
7. Trustee Mexican American Foundation 1975 - 1981
8. Neighborhood House board 1975 - 1977
9. Board member Centro Cultural (Chicano Artists' Association) 1977 - 1979
10. Consultant informally to Mayor Wilson, Councilman Jim Bates, Lucy Killea, Pete Chacon.

HONORS & RECOGNITION:

1. Neighborhood House - recognition for community service plaque (1973)
2. Mexican American Foundation "Woman of the Year" award (1974)
3. Mexican American Foundation "Oradora de Honor" (1978)
4. SDG&E - consumer advisory panel service award (1980)
5. Salvation Army Door of Hope Women's Auxillary - Women of Distinction Award (1981)

History

Laura Rodriguez's long service to the City of San Diego and particularly to the Barrio culminated in the founding of the Chicano Community Health Center and her charismatic personality, ceaseless work and untiring devotion has been largely responsible for its phenomenal growth. She opens the clinic doors at 8:30 and closes them at 5:00 except Tuesday and Thursday evenings when our walk-in clinic extends to 8:30 resulting in a 12-hour day for her.

The clinic has had an interesting tortuous history. It was built 60 years ago by the Marston family as a community and medical facility for what was then a small Mexican community. Since at that time no Mexican-American community service organization existed, title to the building was held by the Neighborhood House. The building served various functions through the years, but gradually was allowed to deteriorate when Neighborhood House built a new and larger center elsewhere in San Diego.

Since only two private physicians were available to service what had developed into a large community of 10,000 (largely Chicanos but some blacks and caucasians), the Chicano community successfully negotiated the return of the building to its original purpose as a medical facility.

Mexican Americans led by Laura Rodriguez, public-spirited citizens - Dr. Ralph Ocampo, Richard Weiss, Dr. David Allen

(a Pediatrician - now assistant dean of U.C.S.D. Medical School), Dr. Donald Atlas and others started a free clinic with meager donated medical equipment, supplies and drugs.

After three years of amicable negotiations, aided by Mayor Wilson, with Neighborhood House, funds were raised to purchase the property and what began as a humble "aspirin and band-aid dispensing walk-in clinic" two evenings per week, flourished to its present complex multiple service operation.

Laura Rodriguez persuaded Mr. Otto A. Hirr, Assistant to the President, of the San Diego Gas & Electric Company to become President of the Board of Directors, an office he actively holds to this day. Mr. Hirr was instrumental in obtaining construction workers and materials to gradually rebuild and expand our services. Financial support was obtained from United Way, the county (revenue sharing), voluntary contributions and finally this year from the Federal government (H.H.R. - formerly H.E.W.).

The Clinic with a salaried staff of 33, 3 full-time dentists and 6 part-time dentists, a full-time physician medical director, a panel of 20 MDs (some on contract salary and others volunteer), social service, medical laboratory, x-ray, pharmacy, eye clinic, family planning, speech correction, podiatry, nutrition, general medicine, gynecology, dermatology, cardiology (the latter two staffed by Scripps Clinic MDs), cancer prevention and disability evaluation consultations for the State Department of Health. The Clinic has over 2,000 patient visits per month with an annual budget of approximately \$600,000. The Clinic has outgrown the available space and is constantly expanding its facilities.

Community Service

Social Service Advocate (Voluntary) - Prior to the organization and establishment of the Chicano Federation and the Mexican American Foundation Laura was the only person in the Barrio who had complete knowledge of the various county, city, state and federal social service agencies in addition to her familiarity with the courts, judicial and immigration problems. Her counseling skills in these areas became well known and for the past 30 years she has been constantly available night and day - at her little home near the Clinic and by phone to all who had such problems. Despite her exceedingly long hours of work at the Clinic, she seems indefatigable; her services at home are always available to those who need her.

Leadership

Board Member Mexican American Senior Center 1975 - 1981

Board Member Senior Citizens Health Center (4th Ave.) 1974 - 1978

Board Member SDG&E Consumer Advisory Panel 1978 - 1980

Member Housing Commission City of San Diego 1975 - 1981

Member Task Force on crime prevention and organized by Chief of Police Kollender and directed by Capt. Walker S.E.S.D.P.D. 1980 - 1981

Laura by virtue of her empathy and ability to listen and remember what she has heard is of inestimable value to this task force. She has mastered the difficult art of acting with discretion without being an informant.

Board Member of Chicano Federation 1970 - 1981

Trustee Mexican American Foundation 1975 - 1981

Neighborhood House Board 1975 - 1977

Board Member Centro Cultural (Chicano Artists' Association) 1977 - 1979

Consultant informally to Mayor Wilson, Councilman & Supervisor Jim Bates, Councilwoman Lucy Killea, Assemblyman Pete Chacon.

Honors & Recognition

Neighborhood House - recognition for community service plaque (1973)

Mexican American Foundation "Women of the Year" Award (1974)

Mexican American Foundation "Oradora de Honor" (1978)

SDG&E - Consumer Advisory Panel Service Award (1980)

Salvation Army Door of Hope Women's Auxillary - Women of Distinction Award (1981)

Laura Rodriguez now in her 71st year was born and has lived in the Barrio all of her life. She is one of three siblings born of an Italian father and Mexican mother. When Laura was 4 years old their mother died and the children lived with their blind father who sold newspapers for a living in downtown San Diego. When their father died, Helen Marston, of the prominent Marston family, who had befriended the family became their legal guardian. Through the generosity and kindness of the Marston family they lived in the Marston house for two years.

Laura finished high school and married David Rodriguez, a gardner and handyman. They had four children. She now is personally fulfilled by 11 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren to whom she is a great matriarchal figure.

She attributes her relentless social conscience to her Marston experience which she expresses with the modest words, "Miss Helen Marston befriended us and when our parents died she became our guardian and a kind and loving friend. In a way, I am giving back what she gave us."

SUMMARY

Laura Rodriguez now in her 71st year was born and raised in the Logan Heights Barrio and has dedicated her entire life to bettering the lives of the Barrio people. Despite the handicap of death of her mother and dependence on a blind father who barely sustained his family by operating a downtown newstand, Laura managed to complete high school as a ward of a prominent San Diego family.

The generosity and kindness of this family imbued Laura with a powerful, unremitting sense of social responsibility. Although her circumstances required her to do menial work, she acquired professional knowledge of, County, City, State and Federal social agencies, which, she generously shared and imparted to the needy throughout her life.

She is one of the founders of what began as an insignificant free clinic and through her charismatic personality and tireless energy, developed into the Chicano Community Health Center in the Barrio. This thriving Clinic has become one of the most respected, cost effective, centers of primary medical care in the City of San Diego.

Despite these fulfilling achievements Laura Rodriguez has remained a modest, self-effacing woman of great dignity and bearing whose reputation is known to only a few outside the Mexican American community.

From 1945 thru 1960, she helped support her family by menial work as a housekeeper, hospital aid, etc.

By this time her self-taught social service skills and knowledge became well-known in the Barrio and her help and advice were constantly in demand.

Although travel was not within her reach, her interest and curiosity about the rest of the world was somewhat fulfilled by the voracious reading that gave her incredible vision and scope of history, politics, literature, and music. Her insatiable curiosity has made her a probing "question asker" of all who cross her path. Her retention and recall of all this information is remarkable.

She is equally articulate in Spanish and English; open and direct and singularly devoid of affectation and artifice.

Since the founding of the Clinic (see Section C) Laura with several kitchen assistants would prepare each month at the Clinic a fine Mexican lunch for upwards of 100 people, "Anglo" and Mexican. This monthly fiesta is known as "Hour in the Barrio". It is often attended by prominent political and cultural figures, State officials, the Mayor, Councilmen, County Supervisors, etc. These luncheons keynote and culminate in the "Annual Evening with The Stars" which has raised thousands of dollars for support of the Clinic and other Barrio services under the aegis of the Mexican American Foundation under the direction of Tony Valencia.

For five years after the Clinic was established Laura would prepare and serve a similar Mexican lunch at the Clinic for

upwards of 25 foreign students from various local universities to familiarize them with the Mexican community and the activities of the Clinic.

Despite the complexity of the numerous services the Clinic offers, Laura is always alert and aware of the quality of these services and constantly monitors the staff to be certain that all patients are treated fairly and with dignity. She is particularly aware of the pride and sensitivety of indigents. One must witness her surreptitiously provide money from her own pocket for bus fare or food to some penniless patient seeking medical care.

Laura's entire life has been dedicated unceasingly to the support of the downtrodden and indigent; she appears determined to continue this pattern of giving until the end.