

■ RETROSPECT

Mi Familia: The Hispanic Student Society at Texas Tech University

By Curtis Peoples, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library
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HSS selling fajitas at the UC during Hispanic Cultural Awareness Week

HSS students in front of the seal at the Broadway entrance to Texas Tech University

The Hispanic Student Society is the oldest Hispanic organization at Texas Tech University. The organization has a strong history of service and commitment to the advancement of Hispanic students through higher education. In 1964, Desi Pesina Jr. led the effort to establish a Hispanic organization on campus. The organization consisted of Hispanic students who joined together to promote service to Texas Tech University and the Lubbock community.

The organization was first known as Los Tertulianos, which is a Native-American word meaning social gatherers. The organization participated in sit-ins and demonstrated against the Vietnam War, racial discrimination and segregation. By 1967, the organization had grown to about 40 members. The members published their views in a newspaper called *La Voz de los Llanos*, also known as *El Editor*. Robert Montemayor, who was a member of Los Tertulianos, was later nominated for two Pulitzer Prizes and was part of a team that won a Pulitzer Prize Gold Medal for Meritorious Public Service in 1984.

In 1980, the organization changed its name to United Mexican-American Students (UMAS). UMAS made their presence known through fund raisers and were active in community celebrations such as Las Fiestas del Llano. Dennis Garza, who was a past president of UMAS, served as assistant attorney general during both of Texas Attorney General Dan Morales' terms.

In the fall of 1984, the organization renamed themselves the Hispanic Student Society (HSS). The name change reflected the growing number of Hispanic students now attending Texas Tech. Along with the name change came a new tradition, Hispanic

Cultural Awareness Week. The week consists of seminars, exhibits, food and entertainment representing past and present Hispanic culture. The organization also celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month with various activities.

The HSS has grown into a strong organization that participates in many service projects on and off campus. The HSS mentors children from diverse socioeconomic neighborhoods and volunteers at community centers. Through their community service with children, HSS members try to show them that "yes, a higher education is possible... we are doing it, so you can do it, too." The organization has also helped minorities in the pursuit of higher education through the Upward Bound program.

In 1997, the HSS was nominated for and won the Texas Tech University Outstanding Community Service Award for their service in the Lubbock community. The Texas Tech Alumni Association invited acting president Sofia Rodriguez and former president Jobi Martinez to accept the award during the 1997 Homecoming ceremonies. Rodriguez recalled, "We received the award on the football field, . . . and it was a great honor and wonderful feeling." HSS members recall that they were the first minority organization on campus to win the award. Jobi Martinez was an integral person in helping the Buddy Holly Center with research during its inception. Martinez now works for Texas Tech helping to recruit and assist students. Sofia Rodriguez was the first Regional Recruitment Coordinator for TTU in the El Paso office and then became an assistant dean of students for Texas Tech University. Rodriguez is now teaching for the San Antonio Independent School District.

Members of HSS state, "They could not have accomplished what they have without the assistance of the Hispanic Student Society and Texas Tech University."

The Hispanic Student Society was the first Hispanic organization to offer a scholarship on campus. The Hispanic Student Society offers a scholarship in memory of Willie Enriquez. Enriquez, who was acting president of the HSS, was killed in an automobile accident in 1986. In the spring of 1990, the organization awarded the first scholarship to Abe Ramirez, who also served as president of the organization. The HSS awards two \$250 annual scholarships to one male and one female recipient.

By 1999, the HSS had grown to 110 members. The Hispanic Student Society recruits new members for the fall semester from late August through mid-October. Spring recruitment runs from the first of January through mid-February. Regular organization meetings are held during the academic year and the organization tries to conduct two community service projects during the summer. The members of the HSS are now more diverse, ambitious, and career-oriented than before. Membership is opened to all enrolled at Texas Tech University students in good standing interested in academic success, community service and cultural awareness.

The Hispanic Student Society is an important institution at Texas Tech. In the words of one its members, "In all honesty, coming from a small town to Tech I almost left the university because I thought it was too big and really couldn't relate to anyone. . . . Then I met someone who encouraged me to go to a HSS meeting and I'm so glad I did. HSS is my familia." ■