



Women's HISTORY MONTH

HER story

THE LAS CRUCES Bulletin

Celebrating a Legacy: Emma "Sis" Warnke and Michele Rose Warnke Self

BY SANDRA MOULTON
For the Las Cruces Bulletin

Emma "Sis" Warnke was a woman ahead of her time.

Born on April 22, 1918, she dedicated her life to proving that age is no barrier to movement, vitality, or achievement. She often said, "You don't stop moving because you get old, you get old because you stop moving." Her belief in the power of physical activity not only shaped her own life but also inspired countless others in Doña Ana County and beyond. Growing up during the Great Depression, Warnke learned the value of hard work and perseverance. She worked tirelessly to put herself through college, an achievement that paved the way for a lifelong commitment to education and physical fitness. She became a beloved Physical Education teacher at Alameda Junior High School, where she inspired generations of students to stay active and embrace healthy lifestyles.

After retiring from teaching, Warnke opened Sis Warnke's Dance-wear Shop to stay busy and support her youngest daughter, Mickey, who owned her own ballet studio.

Despite people telling her she was too old, Warnke took her first run at the age of 62 and was immediately ad-

dicted. Soon after, she added bicycling to her routine. Her shop became the meeting place for a local group of seniors who called themselves the "Bike and Chowder Club." They gath-

ered for a 20-mile ride three times a week, followed by a hearty breakfast where they would "chow down" and enjoy each other's company.

At the age of 80, she took on one of her most impressive challenges—biking across the state of Kansas. This remarkable feat was yet another testament to her belief that age should never be a limitation. A true pioneer in senior athletics, Warnke was instrumental in establishing the Doña Ana Senior Olympic Games in 1987, a local extension of the National Senior Games. Through her work, she provided an avenue for older adults to stay active, competitive, and socially engaged. Her dedication to promoting physical fitness among seniors helped redefine aging, proving that life after retirement could be just as energetic and fulfilling as any other stage of life.

Warnke's enthusiasm for movement and sports was not merely professional—it was deeply personal. She herself was a passionate participant in various athletic events, demonstrating firsthand the benefits of an active lifestyle. Whether it was running or cycling, she remained

engaged in physical pursuits well into her later years, embodying the very philosophy she preached. Of the rooms full of medals and trophies she earned throughout her athletic career, she was most proud of her New Mexico Golden Athlete Award, which she received in 1998. The selection was based on athletic ability, community service, and efforts to further senior programs. Her advice to seniors was simple yet powerful: "Keep moving!"

Emma "Sis" Warnke's legacy is one of empowerment, resilience, and action. Her influence is still felt today in the continued success of the Doña Ana Senior Olympic Games and the many seniors who embrace fitness as a way of life. She proved that age is not a limitation, but rather an opportunity to continue striving, learning, and achieving. Each of her four children were heavily involved in sports as well, including her three daughters who were active in dance, gymnastics, and cheerleading. In fact, her oldest

daughter, Elizabeth Burgess, is the current president of the Doña Ana Senior Olympics Board of Directors.

Her youngest daughter, Michele Rose Warnke, whom everyone called "Mickey," was a devoted cheerleader throughout high school and college. She was a mentor to younger cheerleaders and, sponsored by Barbara "Mother Hubbard," became the first All-American Cheerleader at New Mexico State University. Her school and Aggie pride knew no limits. Mickey went on to open Michele's Dance Academy, bringing dance to the stage in Las Cruces. The studio's first performance of *The Nutcracker* was held outside on the steps of her first studio downtown. Today, it has celebrated its 41st annual performance, becoming a cherished tradition in the community.

In 1983, Michele Warnke Self founded the Las Cruces Chamber Ballet in hopes of promoting classical

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CELEBRATING A LEGACY

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ballet and various dance forms. The organization has strived to provide serious dance students with opportunities to develop their talents and

gain professional performance experience. Over the years, it has grown into the longest continuously running professional ballet company in New Mexico, enriching the cultural landscape of Las Cruces.

As we celebrate Women's History,

we honor the lasting contributions of Emma "Sis" Warnke - a woman who redefined what it means to grow older and left a legacy of movement, health, and joy for generations to come, and Michele "Mickey" Warnke Self - a woman who pioneered to

bring dance, art and culture to the community. Their spirit of perseverance and dedication to fitness and the arts lives on through their family, the Senior Olympic Games, and the thriving dance community in Las Cruces.

Nicole Black: Keeping it humble

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

Nicole Black went to work for Las Cruces Home Builders Association (LCHBA) in August 2013 at the front desk, earning minimum wage. Today, she is executive director of the organization as it expands its mission and territory and morphs into New Mexico Construction Association (NMCA).

"I can't build a house, but I can definitely make that happen and smooth out the process," Black said. "I try to bring things together, connecting people and advocating for the construction industry."

Among many other duties for more

than 300 association members, Black oversees the annual Las Cruces Home and Garden Show, the Home Builders' Showcase of Homes coming up this spring and the 10th anniversary Casa for a Cause.

Casa for a Cause began in 2014, as Las Cruces builders and subcontractors donate labor and materials at cost to build a house. When the house is sold, the profit is donated to local non-profit organizations. Total donations are expected to reach \$1 million with the sale of the 2024 Casa for a Cause house, Black said.

She also leads the NMCA-sponsored Build My Future, which brought together more than 1,500 high school

students from Las Cruces and throughout southern New Mexico last October - up from 200 in 2019 - to gain hands-on-experience working with local builders and tradesmen.

Build My Future "is literally about showing our youth the trade," Black said, including everything from welding, dry-walling and stucco work to framing, plumbing and pouring cement.

Construction is a great career, she said, because "you're always going to need a roof over your head and a floor under your feet and everything in between. That's our industry."

NMCA is also part of Education House, in collaboration with KT Homes of Las Cruces, Tierra del Sol Housing Corporation, Organ Mountain High School and Las Moñtanas Charter High School. It gives students hands-on building experience "from the ground up," Black said.

Build My Future and Education House train both girls and boys for good-paying jobs in the construction industry.

"We're seeing a lot more girls starting to come in," Black said. "I tell the girls, 'you got this; you can do this.'"

Black remembers going with KT Homes founder Kent Thurston to deliver lumber to Las Moñtanas students to build a table. When the project was complete, one of the participating students asked if he could take the table home "so my family can sit down together," he said. (The answer was "yes.")

"Builders are good people," Black said. "We do so much. Our doors are open to anybody, youth or adult, that's interested in construction," she said. "There is nothing more rewarding than



connecting people in our industry."

Leading NMCA "is not work to me," Black said. "I see it as doing something I love."

Black, who was raised in a single-parent home, became a mother at age 14. Without a college degree, she began work in human resources for a local construction company before joining NMCA.

"I just remain very humble," she said.

Richard Coltharp, a journalism professor at New Mexico State University, worked with Black on several projects during his time with the Las Cruces Bulletin from 2010-2023.

"Nicole has always been a no-nonsense person with a get-things-done approach," Coltharp said. "She's also creative and is able to work well with and get along with a wide variety of people. The Las Cruces Home Builders Association made positive strides under her direction."

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Katy Camunez: Put Mesilla on the Map

BY MIKE COOK

For the Las Cruces Bulletin

Katy Griggs Camunez (1914-1998) started the landmark restaurant La Posta de la Mesilla on the historic Mesilla plaza in September 1939 in the back room of a compound dating to the 1840s that was once the Corn Exchange Hotel.

The hotel was later a stop on the Butterfield Stagecoach line and, now, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Jerean Camunez Hutchinson, Katy's great niece, said she and her husband, Tom, are "the blessed stewards of an amazing legacy."

"Katy would be very proud that we have continued the legacy she started 85 years ago," Jerean said.

Katy got her start with the restaurant by asking her uncle, then-prominent local merchant George Griggs, to help her start a chile store. For \$1, he deeded her the small room, which had four tables, a dirt floor and no running water. Katy's mother did the cooking, using some of the recipes that are still on the La Posta menu today, Jerean said.

Katy was a shrewd businesswoman, a hard worker and an entrepreneur. She invented tostadas y chile, known today as chips and salsa, and made them free to her customers, Jerean said. Katy also created the tostada compuesta cup.

Katy used chile grown by Mesilla Valley farmers in her recipes, a tradition that continues today.

"Katy pretty much put Mesilla on the map," Tom said.

Katy also "supported people in need," by taking her homemade enchiladas in the trunk of her car to feed the hungry in the community.

The "Legends of La Posta" wall in the restaurant honors Katy and legendary employees Juanita Nieto (1924-2004), Francisca "Panchita" Flores (1916-2006) and Elisa "Licha"

Carnero Gallegos (1938-2018).

"These women are the backbone of La Posta," Jerean said, remembering "the stamina, the strength, the grit" of Panchita, who made salsa every morning. Jerean called Panchita "the heart and soul of our back kitchen."

Katy "was known to make people blush," Jerean said.

When the Hutchinsons became engaged in 1979, Katy hosted a gathering for them at La Posta that was attended by Tom's Irish grandfather and French grandmother. Katy, wearing makeup ala Mae West, walked into the room, said "Hi, everybody!" sat in Tom's grandfather's lap and ran her fingers through his hair, Tom remembers. The old man turned red with embarrassment, and "my grandmother almost came across the table," he said.

"There was only one Katy. She had a big personality," Tom said.

Tom and Jerean bought La Posta in 1996. They expanded; added items to the menu like seafood, a second, hotter chile and La Posta's unique version of fajitas; and started serving tequila and signature margaritas, including one made with agave wine.

The Legends of La Posta also includes Manuel "Rucho" Chavez (1924-2015), who worked at La Posta for 50 years, and Everardo "Gilito" Lopez (1926-2015), known as "The Piranha and Bird Man" because he took care of the sharp-toothed fish and the parrots, cockatoos and toucans Katy found homes for in the restaurant lobby as another attraction.

A piranha and multiple colorful and talkative birds continue to draw people to La Posta.

When you go to another restaurant, "you're an eater," Tom said.

"When you come here, you're a diner," he said. "You're looking for an experience."

A section of an original adobe



wall is preserved behind a sheet of glass near the entrance to La Posta's main dining area. Some of the building's original vigas are also visible and some have an "M" carved into them to designate their destination as they were floated down the Rio Grande. There is also wall tile Katy brought back from Spain.

Among La Posta's 120 employees are three servers Katy hired more than 40 years ago.

"We're still a family restaurant," Jerean said.

La Posta draws about 300,000 peo-

ple a year, which is close to half the annual attendance at nearby White Sands National Park, Tom said.

"I seat people from all over the world," La Posta host and long-time Las Cruces frame shop and art gallery owner Ron Saltzman said.

Tom and Jerean are at work on a new tribute to Katy Griggs Camunez. Katy's Korner, just across the street from the restaurant, will be a small park, Tom said, and will include a bronze statue of Katy forever overlooking her treasured La Posta.



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THE PROCESS

1 Start with a mammogram

Mammograms are an essential part of preventive healthcare for women. Because breast cancer is very common, and because early detection is so important for successful treatment, most women who are over 40 should schedule a mammogram every year.

3D mammography is a clinically proven screening and diagnostic tool for early breast cancer detection. It uses advanced technology to take images of your breast from different angles and combine them to create a more complete and accurate image of your breast than is possible with regular 2D digital mammography.

For a routine annual (screening) mammogram, women 40 and older do not need a written referral. For patients experiencing unusual breast symptoms, a written referral is required for a diagnostic mammogram.

Screening for dense breasts

Annual mammograms are the best way to catch breast cancer early, but not all breasts are the same. Dense breast tissue can mask the appearance of tumors, making it more difficult for mammography to detect cancer.

If you are one of the 40% of women with dense breast tissue, your provider may recommend an MRI, whole breast ultrasound or automated breast ultrasound (ABUS) for additional screening and added peace of mind. Memorial Medical Center is the only facility in Las Cruces offering this advanced technology.

2 What if everything looks normal?

Most mammograms don't find anything out of the ordinary. If this is the case, schedule your next annual mammogram and keep an eye on your breast health throughout the year by performing self-exams. Visit your primary care provider immediately if any concerns arise.

3 What if something doesn't look right?

If your provider spots something unusual, they may ask to schedule a breast ultrasound. A breast ultrasound uses medical sonography to obtain additional images of the breast that can help to identify benign or suspicious lesions. With the Mammo to Answers program, we will expedite unusual findings to a breast ultrasound.

Most unusual mammogram findings are not cancer.

A breast ultrasound can show whether a breast lump is a fluid-filled breast cyst (usually not cancerous) or a solid mass (which could be cancer and may need further testing through a biopsy).

4 What if something still doesn't look right?

If your breast ultrasound yields unusual findings, your provider may recommend a biopsy. A breast biopsy is a procedure that involves using a biopsy needle or surgery to remove a sample of your breast tissue so that a pathologist can examine it for breast cancer or other conditions.

A breast biopsy is the only diagnostic procedure that can definitively determine if a suspicious area is cancerous. Most often this will be a core needle biopsy (CNB). But in some situations, such as if the results of a needle biopsy aren't clear, you might need a surgical biopsy. A pathologist then determines what type of disease, if any, is present.

5 What if something doesn't look right?

A cancer diagnosis can feel overwhelming. But don't worry! When detected early via a mammogram, breast cancer is often highly treatable. Cancer Warriors offers many resources that can help you. To learn more, visit Cancer Warriors on Facebook or online.



Memorial Medical Center

Memorial
Cancer Center

Cancer Center Locations:

Hematology and Oncology

2530 S. Telshor Blvd., Suite 107
Las Cruces, NM 88011

Phone: 575.521.1554
Fax: 855.715.7897

Radiation Oncology

2450 S. Telshor Blvd., Suite B
Las Cruces, NM 88011

Phone: 575.556.5800
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