

The University of Texas at Brownsville



Nursing Role Model

Connecting with Students through Teaching and Generosity



Dr. Eloisa G. Taméz with a photo of her parents. Dr. Taméz understands the critical need to increase the number of Hispanic nurses in leadership roles.

When Eloisa G. Taméz was a little girl, her father farmed the family's three acres along the Texas-Mexico border in El Calaboz, about 14 miles west of Brownsville, Texas.

Eloisa remembers how her father trudged behind the plow pulled by the family horse, Gardenia. She recalls that, when her father returned home, her mother would apply a compress made of paste from the golondrina plant to her father's aching eyes.

"His goggles were not enough protection from *el azufre* (the sulfur) that he would sprinkle from a burlap sack onto the vegetables, waging war against insects," she said. "I remember how hard it was for my father, the plowing, planting and watering, done mostly at night when it was cooler. The sulfur seeped into his goggles and hurt his eyes. Those memories have stayed with me all these years."

Those memories would also help Eloisa determine her life's work. From the time she was a sophomore at San Benito High School, Eloisa knew that, like her mother, she wanted to heal people. She knew she wanted to be a nurse.

"I was very fortunate to receive a scholarship from the Cameron/Willacy County Ladies Auxiliary," Eloisa said. "It paid for all my education at St. Mary's Hospital School of Nursing in Galveston."

In recognition of the scholarship that launched her nursing career, and to honor her late parents, Eloisa established the José Cavazos García and Lydia Esparza García Scholarship Endowment for nurses seeking the Master of Science in Nursing at UT Brownsville (UTB).

Answering an Obligation to Serve Others

Eloisa earned her master's and doctoral degrees from The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio while also serving as Chief Nurse with the Department of Veteran's Affairs. After retiring from her 27-year career, Eloisa, now Dr. Taméz, came home to the Rio Grande Valley and entered academia—first at The University of Texas-Pan American and then UTB.

"I always believed that I needed to return to the Valley so that I could be a role model to Hispanics who may want to go into nursing," she said.

According to Dr. Taméz, a tremendous void exists in the nursing profession, with only two percent of the nation's 3.1 million nurses being Hispanic. She feels a critical need not only to increase their numbers but also to expand the number of Hispanic nurses with graduate degrees in leadership positions. As one of the statistical few who advanced in the profession, Dr. Taméz feels an obligation to assist others.

Dr. Taméz returned to the Valley so she could be a role model for others interested in entering the nursing profession.

"Now I am working directly with tomorrow's nurses who will fill leadership roles," said Dr. Taméz, who joined UTB in the 2004 fall semester as Program Director for the newly established Master of Science in Nursing Program. "Today, just as in the past, scholarships are essential. I felt a scholarship would be a fitting way to honor our parents, to remember their names in a meaningful way."

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Dr. Taméz established an endowment to honor her parents and the land her family inherited.

Ironically, misfortune served as the catalyst for Dr. Taméz' decision to establish the endowment. In the spring of 2009, her beloved family property was bisected by the U.S. Government so the border wall could be constructed.

"These three acres that my father inherited from the San Pedro de Carricitos Land Grant are just as valuable to us, as a family, as the grant's original 12,000 acres, because of what it means to us to have land," she said. "From land, we—my parents, my father, my grandfather—carved a life for us as farmers."

Dr. Taméz had taken the land acquisition matter to court the year prior, but it wasn't until November 2013 that she received compensation for the lost 0.26 acres.

"This is my parents' land, and always will be, in my mind," said Dr. Taméz. "I see myself as a custodian of this property. The best justification I have to give up a bit of our property is to use some of the settlement in a positive way. It became clear to me: Put it toward a scholarship fund for advanced nursing degrees, to help raise up those who will be safeguarding the health of our community."