

Funkhouser served as only female Times editor

Veteran journalist dies at 84 in Fairacres, NM

By Alex Hinojosa

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Barbara Funkhouser, a journalism pioneer who was the first woman to become editor of the El Paso Times, died Friday night at her home in Fairacres, N.M. She was 84.

She is the only female editor in the newspaper's 133-year history. She was editor from 1980 to 1986.

Funkhouser began her career in 1958 as a freelancer for a year, then worked for a Las Cruces paper for a year before being hired at the El Paso Times. Funkhouser also wrote the coffee-table book, "The Caregivers: El Paso's Medical History, 1898-1998."

Friends and former colleagues described Funkhouser as very straightforward and ethical.

"She was a great lady with tre-

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SHARI V. HILL — LAS CRUCES SUN

Barbara Funkhouser is shown picking grapes last year at Tatreault Vineyard.

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RUDY GUTIERREZ — EL PASO TIMES FILE

Associate Editor and Editorial Page Editor Barbara Funkhouser is shown May 27, 1990. She retired June 1, 1990, after a 30-year career at the El Paso Times, where she served as editor from 1980 to 1986.

Viescas said, some of her favorite conversations with Funkhouser were after the editorial meetings during election season.

"When we were working on the editorial page together, we would interview all the candidates and I think some of the best con-

versations we had between us were after the interviews," Viescas said. "We always had great conversations, whether it was while I was still working at the paper or afterwards. I could discuss anything with her." Viescas said she tries to instill the lessons she

learned from Funkhouser in her lessons — honesty and ethics.

"I can honestly say that my students are learning now what I learned from Barbara," she said. "Honesty and ethics, those were number one in her book. She wasn't afraid to tell you what she thought, especially if you were a co-worker. I tell my students, 'The worst thing you can do is lie to me. I'd rather you be honest even if you made a mistake.' She is the most ethical person I have ever known."

Funkhouser was born March 1, 1930, at Hotel Dieu hospital and was raised on a farm in Fairacres, near Las Cruces, that her parents had owned since 1924. Her father died when she was 6, and her mother ran the farm with help of hired labor, according to an oral history she did in 1996 with the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum.

She graduated from Las Cruces Union High School and from New Mexico State University in 1952. She spent six months in Europe on a 4-H Club exchange program and then worked for five years for the 4-H organization in Washington, D. C., and Chicago, before returning to New Mexico and beginning her career as a journalist, according

to the oral history.

During her 30-year career at the El Paso Times, Funkhouser interviewed singer-artist Vikki Carr in 1973 and 21-year-old Kurt Russell when he joined the El Paso Sun Kings baseball team. Funkhouser also covered the El Paso premiere of the 1968 film "Firecreek," and interviewed James Stewart, Barbara Luna, director Vincent McEveety and screenwriter Calvin Clements.

"Barbara was an inspiration to generations of Southwest journalists," said El Paso Times Editor Robert Moore, who worked with her for four years. "She worked hard in a male-dominated world of journalism and set a path that is followed to this day. She had remarkable knowledge about what was going on in El Paso and New Mexico."

Funkhouser retired from the El Paso Times on June 1, 1990. She taught at New Mexico State University and was a part-time editorial writer for the Las Cruces Sun-News for several years.

She continued running Tatreault Vineyard on her family farm until her death.

Funeral arrangements are pending.

Alex Hinojosa may be reached at 546-6137. Times Editor Robert Moore contributed to this report.

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mendous integrity and was really concerned about doing the right thing for everyone involved," said Tom Fenton, former president, editor and publisher of the El Paso Times. "She was good and you always knew where she stood. She always stood for the right thing."

Fenton described Funkhouser as a terrific editor who could be blunt, but was never rude.

"She was really straightforward and very direct," Fenton said. "She had no patience for any kind of shady dealings or special interests groups."

Fenton recalled a time when Funkhouser was at a Rotary Club of El Paso meeting and there was a great deal of controversy over the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station. The nuclear plant, located in Arizona, was completed in 1986.

"She stood up in front of the Rotary Club of El Paso and at the time there was a big controversy on whether El Paso Electric should invest in the plant because they were a big investor at that point. And she told them, 'You're making a big deal of this right now, but mark my words, in a few

years you will be glad your company invested in this nuclear plant."

Today, El Paso Electric has a 15.8 percent invested interest in the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station.

Diana Washington Valdez, a longtime reporter at the El Paso Times, said Funkhouser's advice to her still applies today.

"Barbara was a friend and a mentor who opened her home to everyone," Valdez said. "She once gave me some great advice: 'If you want to know what the Democrats are up to, go ask the Republicans. If you want to know what the Republicans are up to, go ask the Democrats.' It's an important news principle that applies generally."

Carol Viescas, former assistant editorial page editor for the El Paso Times, said after she left the newspaper to teach, she and Funkhouser stayed friends and Viescas would visit her at her Tatreault Vineyard.

Viescas is currently teaching journalism at Bel Air High School.

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