

The late Pipina Salas-Porras cracked glass ceilings

by **Robbie Myrick Villalobos**
Business Bridge editor

Josefina (Pipina) A. Salas-Porras cracked many a glass ceiling in her career as an educator, entrepreneur and philanthropist before pancreatic cancer claimed her Friday morning. The 74-year-old had become a world traveler and spent much time in 2001 on the road with the Freedom Forum Foundation, on which she served as a board member.

Her daughter, Marta Salas-Porras, said her mother's last trip was to spend Thanksgiving with some of her children in California.

"We spent Thanksgiving together, and she had just returned from a fact-finding mission to South Africa with the foundation. She didn't feel well in December and then was diagnosed in January," Marta said. "But she had quite a year with trips to Croatia, Cambodia and the fact-finding mission to South Africa."

And Cinco Puntos Press published "El Ratoncito Pequeño," a book with a children's poem that Salas-Porras recalled from her youth that was illustrated by her childhood friend, artist Jose



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Cisneros.

Her daughter, Marta Salas-Porras, said the outpouring of concern and appreciation from friends across the nation who heard of her mother's illness has been overwhelming.

"We received over 300 cards from people who she had helped with everything from scholarships to getting medical operations," Marta said. "She was so charitable in her giving and touched the lives of so many people."

Salas-Porras was the daughter of Enrique and Josefina Acevedo and attend-

ed Houston Elementary School and El Paso High School. She was only 19 when she earned her degree in English with minors in Spanish and Education from Texas College of Mines (now UTEP).

She taught in South El Paso and married fellow UTEP graduate Francisco Salas-Porras in 1948, when they moved to Los Angeles where her husband managed Azteca Films.

Both enjoyed the Hollywood premieres and social life before returning to El Paso in 1965 to raise their family that grew to six children.

In 1970, she founded the Bilingual Institute, an international multicultural teaching firm that helped individuals, businesses, governments and corporations communicate across international borders.

Her business success led to appointments as the first Hispanic woman in many leadership positions. Among the 19 boards she served on are the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas-El Paso Branch, El Paso Electric Co., Mountain Bell-Texas Advisory Board, KCOS Public Television and the El Paso Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Freedom Forum

In 1979, she was named a trustee of the Gannett Foundation, which later became the Freedom Forum, at a time when few Hispanic women served on major U.S. foundation boards. During her 22 years of service, the foundation grew from a grant-making entity to an operating foundation and is now building the Newseum, a news museum on Washington's (D.C.) Pennsylvania Avenue.

Through her affiliation with the Freedom Forum, Pipina Salas-Porras advocated for UTEP and helped secure contributions that ensured El Paso residents of access to quality university education.

She also was a member of the UTEP Woman's Auxiliary, the Alumni Association and the Matrix Society. She was active in the community and participated in many civic and social organizations in El Paso and Juarez, including the Pan American Roundtable and El Boton Rojo.

Marta said her mother kept a sense of humor even in the last four months of illness.

"She put a message herself on the answering machine with the Mark Twain quote about the news of her demise being greatly exaggerated and

she made people laugh even though she was so ill," Marta said. "She died peacefully and all her family was with her as well as her brother and sister. We feel so lucky to have had her as our mother."

Pipina Salas-Porras was preceded in death by her husband Francisco. She is survived by her children — Ana Luisa Salas-Porras, Alberto Salas-Porras, Marta Salas-Porras, Paco Salas-Porras and his wife Donna, Daniel Salas-Porras and wife Kyle, and Cristina Salas-Porras and husband Tony Cardoza — 10 grandchildren, her brother Jorge Enrique Acevedo and sister-in-law Patsy, and her sister Maria Elena Flood and brother-in-law Francis.

The rosary will be at 4 p.m. Sunday, June 9, at St. Matthew's Catholic Church, 400 W. Sunset Church. The funeral will be at 1 p.m. Monday, June 10, at St. Matthews. Interment will follow at Memory Gardens of the Valley Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that contributions be made to the UTEP Development office c/o The Josefina A. Salas-Porras Memorial Scholarship Fund, 1100 N. Stanton, Suite 201, El Paso, TX 79902.