

# Ex-police chief Rodriguez dies at 71

By Adriana M. Chávez

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EL PASO — William “Bill” Rodriguez, the city’s first Mexican-American police chief, died Tuesday at his Central El Paso home after a 12-year battle with liver cancer. He was 71.

Rodriguez, who would have turned 72 Saturday, was chief of the El Paso Police Department from 1977 to 1986.

He retired from the department after a nepotism issue arose when his son, Nick, enrolled in the El Paso Police Academy. Rodriguez had been with the department for 28 years, except for a five-month stint beginning in January 1970 as an executive in Puerto Rico with Blue Bell Inc., a blue jeans manufacturer.

Rodriguez’s daughter, Monique Rodriguez, 36, said her father returned to El Paso because he missed police work. He returned to the de-

## Services

► **Visitation for William Rodriguez, 71, will be from 5 to 9 p.m. Sunday at Martin Funeral Home, 3839 Montana. A rosary will be said at 7 p.m.**

► **A funeral Mass will take place at 10 a.m. Monday at St. Patrick Cathedral, 1118 N. Mesa, with burial to follow at Fort Bliss National Cemetery.**

partment in September 1970 after spending four months working for an accounting firm.

“He had a real passion for

police work and did an amazing job for the city,” Monique Rodriguez said.

William Rodriguez attended El Paso High School but dropped out because “he was too smart for the teacher,” Monique Rodriguez recalled her father saying. William Rodriguez eventually got his GED and a few years later received an accounting degree from the University of Texas at El Paso while working a full-time job and supporting his wife and three children.

Although Rodriguez, who had spent time working as a part-time mathematician at White Sands Missile Range prior to becoming a police officer, had an interest in the stock market and financial issues, his real love was in law enforcement.

Monique Rodriguez recalled her parents’ visit during the 2003 blackouts in New York City, where she was living at the time. Rodriguez was rushing to get

home when she noticed someone directing traffic at 57th Street and 6th Avenue.

“I was walking with a friend and I said ‘That man looks similar to my father,’ and sure enough there he was directing traffic,” Rodriguez said. “You could never take that out of my father.”

In 1989, Rodriguez ran for East Side city representative, but lost in a runoff election against Mateele Rittgers by about 1,000 votes. A short time later, Rodriguez was named chief of UTEP’s Police Department. He retired from the position in 1999.

Current UTEP Police Chief Cliff Walsh said the university community was “deeply saddened” by Rodriguez’s death.

“His honorable service to the El Paso and UTEP communities will not be forgotten,” Walsh said.

When Rodriguez was chief, one of his deputy

chiefs was Leo Samaniego, who would later become El Paso County sheriff.

Sheriff Jimmy Apodaca, who succeeded Samaniego after Samaniego’s death late last year, expressed his condolences.

“I was saddened to hear the news on the passing of former (chief) Bill Rodriguez,” Apodaca said. “Chief Rodriguez was highly respected and his ethical standards and professionalism will long be remembered.”

In a news release, El Paso police Chief Greg Allen said, “Chief Rodriguez was an eloquent chief, in that he was a man with a big heart and able to make very tough decisions.”

Rodriguez is survived by his children, Nick, Roxanne, Monique and Desiree; and Alice, his wife of almost 50 years.

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