

'Arte,' face of H&H for 2 decades, dies at 78

By Alex Hinojosa
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H&H Car Wash and Coffee Shop will never be the same.

Customers were accustomed to having Artemisa "Arte" Salinas greet them with a smile, bring their coffee and treat them with her warm personality.

Arte, who had worked at the coffee shop for more than 20 years, died suddenly during the weekend.



Salinas

Her death caught many by surprise.

She was 78 and was remembered as someone with a unique sense of humor, tough and gentle at the same time.

She died in her sleep at her daughter's home in Juárez. Friends suspect that she died of an asthma attack, but it's really not known. Arte was buried Wednesday in Juárez.

"She didn't seem to have any other health problems," said H&H co-owner Maynard Haddad. "She was a strong and tough woman who was very remarkable. Her smile just lit up the room — she just had a shining personality, and that smile of hers said everything."

Arte worked at the famous landmark at 701 E. Yandell waiting tables and making customers feel good, and she would sometimes help in the kitchen.

The restaurant was recently listed in Texas Monthly's top 50 Mexican restaurants statewide, and Arte might have played a part in that.

Some famous people have eaten at H&H — served by Arte.

She waited on former first lady Laura Bush and University of Texas at El Paso President Diana Natalicio, among other local and national figures who visited the Central El Paso Mex-

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ican diner.

Owners Kenneth and Maynard Haddad attributed the restaurant's success partly to Arte's kind and generous personality.

"She always knew what you might want or need," Maynard Haddad said. "She knew how to take care of customers — she was from the school that understood what good service was all about. Sure, we'll hire someone else, but it won't be the same."

The news came as a shock to customers and the staff who recalled how tough she was.

Seven years ago, Arte survived an assault outside her home in Juárez, Haddad said. A group of men, wanting her purse, attacked her. Arte courageously fought them and kicked several of them in the groin before they began to stab her.

She escaped death by pretending to die on the street, where her attackers left her for dead. It took her a year to recover.

"She was a courageous and strong woman," Maynard Haddad said. "As soon as she was fully recovered, she came asking for her job. And we hired her back because we missed her."

Regular customers welcomed her return as well, including Estela Reyes, public information officer for Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe, who frequented the restaurant on Saturdays when Arte was working.

"Each morning I would start it off by going to the café to eat



MARK LAMBIE / EL PASO TIMES FILE PHOTO

Artemisa "Arte" Salinas serves customers at H&H Car Wash and Coffee Shop in this file photo. Arte, who had worked at the coffee shop for more than 20 years, died suddenly during the weekend. Customers remember Salinas for her smile, warm personality and sense of humor.

and talk to her," Reyes said. "Somehow my weekends weren't complete without her. She knew exactly what I wanted and always made my special 'mammoth' burrito for me. It was an item that wasn't on the menu — a combo of a large flour tortilla, beans, eggs and bacon."

Reyes said she will never forget how Arte comforted her soon after her father died.

"Doña Arte met my dad a few times, but that day — somehow she just knew," Reyes said. "She sat me down and ordered for

me — my mammoth burrito and a bowl of menudo — Dad's favorite. It was her way of reminding me that even though I was grieving, I needed to take care of myself and eat well."

Reyes said she will return to the restaurant, pay her respects and order her mammoth burrito in honor of Arte.

H&H was closed Wednesday due to Arte's death, but will be open for business today. Haddad said the restaurant plans to have a memorial service for Arte. Collections are being tak-

en for her funeral expenses. Arte Salinas is survived by three children.

Though H&H will hire someone else, "no one will replace her," Maynard Haddad said. "She was just the type of person who made it her business to know who you were and know your order by heart. You could come in two months later, and she'd still remember you. Things just won't be the same."

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