

LOUISE J. SCHUESSLER
Helped Found
El Paso County Historical Society

by Lenore Harris Hughes
El Paso Inc. staff writer
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On Oct 6 the Woman's Department of the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce lit the star on the mountain in memory of Mary Louise J. Schuessler who died at the age of 84. Louise, a recipient of the 1979 Conquistador Award - the highest honor the city can bestow on one of its citizens - had been involved in nearly every major endeavor in the community. As many as 30 activities and honors were sometimes listed in one article.

Chief among them was the impressive amount of work she did to bring the El Paso County Historical Society into being in 1954 under the auspices of the chamber's Women's Department when she became its first president. She sent out 2,500 invitations, all hand written. They gained 79 charter members and in two years had 1,200 members. Leading citizens of El Paso were challenged to help Louise record past and living history, thus saving the cultural past of El Paso. Many events were planned such as restoring the old railroad car to the plaza, saving Mandy the Mule and planting a Friendship Tree in front of the Aztec calendar.

Mary Louise Johnson, daughter of William Edward and Margaret Crady Johnson was born on Dec. 2, 1915 in Greenville, Texas. She attended elementary school in Greenville and high school in Dallas.

"My Mother loved to dance," her daughter Barbara said. "Her mother was Irish and condoned dancing in the home, but not in public. When she was in her 20s (and a student at Southern Methodist University), Louise had a chance to compete for a trip to

Hollywood. She won. Her mother would not let her accept the prize, so it went to the next runner up -- Ginger Rogers of movie fame.

"While still a young woman, my mother was in an automobile accident and came out of it, with a broken nose," Barbara said. "My dad was interning as a plastic surgeon so he fixed her nose and, incidentally, fell in love with her, black eyes and all."



She married Dr. Willard W. Schuessler and they moved to Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C., and later were transferred to Brooks Army Medical Center in San Antonio. After he had attained the rank of colonel in the Medical Corps, Schuessler was assigned to Fort Bliss as chief of plastic surgery.

Louise later wrote a story about their journey to El Paso: "We were traveling up bar-

ren Alameda Street through a terrific dust storm. It was March of 1944. I turned to my husband and said, 'Willard, what did you ever do to get transferred here?' One person in El Paso had recommended an apartment owner Willard was in uniform and as soon as the landlady opened the door she said, 'We don't rent to military.' Then, seeing baby Bob in my arms said, "We don't take children." She missed seeing the dog. When she relented and let us stay until we could get quarters, her husband became attached to the dog, and Bob, and played with them in the apartment."

Louise's daughter Betty said, "I remember my Mom most because she was always there for us growing children. She was very busy with all of her activities, but she would always fix lunch for us and we would sometimes go outside and have picnics. She nurtured us -- she was smart witty and very caring. She loved life and instilled into her children the same passions."

Every woman in the city must have read "The Gadabout." Louise was frequently mentioned at parties, coffees, benefits, and other festive events. She was a great fundraiser for poll tax drives, Red Cross funds, Easter Seals, polio, cancer, heart, community concert drives, YWCA, Hotel Dieu Auxiliary, El Paso Symphony, El Paso Zoo and the Woman's Club of El Paso.

Louise and Willard took time to go with their children to visit "Big Tank Ranch," a 45,000-acre spread they owned near Sierra Blanca.

Some of her favorite honors and activities included: 1949 chairman of the Sun Carnival Queen's court, 1953 "First Lady of the Year" of Beta Sigma Phi Sorority, 1954 president of the American Medical Association Alliance, 1954 president of the El Paso

Alumnae Panhellenic, 1961 president of Crockett PTA, 1977 chairman of Anniversario del Paso '73, 1979 director of the Pan American Roundtable, being elected to El Paso County Historical Society's Hall of Honor, and her membership at the Asbury Methodist Church.

Louise died in her sleep Sept. 30. She was preceded in death by her husband, Willard W. Schuessler. She is survived by her daughters Betty and Barbara, her son Bob and his wife Ann, two grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

"She was a fabulous neighbor," said Mary Castillo "I went over for a visit the Tuesday before she died and found her in the garden with her hands in the soil. She raised beautiful flowers, especially roses."

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