

**Southwestern In Focus
WORKS FOR PEOPLE,
CIVIC PROGRESS**

By Tom Bryan
EPT Sundial 1/3/65

Civic work is social work to Mrs. Ernest Ponce, who supplements her civic leadership activities with studies in sociology at Texas Western College.

“Sociology is an area so vast and complex, and which needs so much understanding,” she said, adding she became interested in the field, because “I love people and I think I am capable of helping them.

“It is like teaching a child, who is born without prejudice, to love his fellowmen, regardless of their circumstances.”

To Mrs. Ponce sociology is an “ethnic study”—the study of ethnic and religious groups, in regard to their conflicts and problems in the whole society.

In El Paso people seem to be ashamed of what they are, she said. They are afraid of being discriminated against for being Irish, Mexican, Catholic, Jewish, or whatever, she explained, while they all should be very proud of their cultural background.

To her the merging of cultures in El Paso and the Southwest is the area’s greatest asset. The mixture of cultures and races through intermarriage and other social intercourse will build a higher and better society.

Her highest recognition for her efforts as a lay sociologist was her being named regional director for the National Council of Christians and Jews in November, 1963.

Since she took office, El Paso chapter of the council has conducted a television series,

“New Horizons in Human Relations,” and she said is going to work up a series on police-community relations, to further better understanding of police officials and their problems and the communities problems in relations with peace officers.



WOMAN OF MANY TALENTS—Mrs. Ernest Ponce, at her piano, takes time out during the Christmas season from her many civic activities, including co-directing *The El Paso Times Deck the Halls* contest and being regional director of the National Council of Christians and Jews. Mother of two college-age children, she studies sociology and languages to strengthen her endeavors in social work through civic activities.—(Times Staff Photo)

YOUTH CONFERENCE

In addition she has participated in a TWC youth conference for secondary students, the local primary school “Rearing Children of Good Will Program” and a program for merit employment—furthering job opportunities for people of all races and creeds.

Mrs. Ponce, nee Mary Serrano Llaguno, was born in New York City. Her parents were immigrants from Santander in the Pyrenees of Spain.

“I was brought up in the strict European way, and as the oldest of six children, I was expected to set an example for the others.

“My mother was a real believer in the old saying ‘idleness is the devil’s workshop.’”

Mary Serrano spent her mornings in the library and practiced on the piano four-five hours every afternoon. Because she was an avid reader she developed an extraordinary imagination. She entered a fictitious story of a trip to Holland in a contest, winning a set of encyclopedias. Despite protests of her - school teacher, her mother made her return the encyclopedias, because the story was a lie.

When she was 15 years old, her family stopped in El Paso while en route to California, and decided to settle here, "because of El Paso's international flavor.”

She attended El Paso High School, where “the subject I hated most was physical education.” She had never had the opportunity to take part in sports. “I passed the course because I was a whiz in tap dancing.”

She was graduated from El Paso High, and attended TWC—at the time, Texas School of Mines—before marrying Ernest Ponce in 1936. Ponce is now president of the R-F Macaroni Co. of El Paso. They reside at 3923 O’Keefe Drive.

Their son, Wayne, 23, completed two years at TWC, and is on active duty with the U.S. Navy. Their daughter, Maureen, 19, is a sophomore at TWC.

“My first responsible job was being a Cub Scout den mother,” she said.

“I wondered if I could handle it-I tossed and turned for a whole night worrying about it.”

She soon found she could handle the job, and later became a Brownie Scout leader working with her daughter. She is a past president of St. Joseph’s Catholic Home and School Board (P-TA), served for three years and was vice president of St. Joseph's Parish Council and served as chairman of the local District Council of Catholic Women.

She is a past director for Travelers Aid, El Paso Cancer Society, McCall Day Nursery, El Paso Girl Scout Community Council, and was secretary for the board of the Catholic Welfare Association.

In addition, she is a member and past president of Austin Terrace Garden Club, immediate past president of the Council of El Paso Garden Clubs and was the 1960 general chairman for the garden clubs’ annual flower show at the Coliseum.

In 1961, she served as president of El Paso Chamber of Commerce Women’s Department. That year, because of a department drive, El Paso was named third in the nation in a Cleanest Town Contest . Mrs. Ponce, as department president, organized the Pecos, Tex., Chamber of Commerce Women's Department.

She was co-chairman in 1963 of the department’s Downtown flower basket project.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

She was co-chairman of El Paso County Women’s Democratic Committee during the late President John F. Kennedy’s successful campaign in the County in 1960. She was named “Toastmistress of the Term” in 1962,

as a member of Pitaya Toastmistress Club. And she was table decorations chairman for the 1002 Sun Carnival Coronation in the County Coliseum.

Mrs. Ponce served as co-chairman of The El Paso Times 1964 Deck the Halls contest for indoor Christmas decorations. Under her leadership, the contest was expanded to include Juarez and Mesilla Valley of New Mexico. The contest, which had 30 entries in 1963, drew a record 113 entries in 1964.

In addition to her leadership qualities, she is artistically talented. She enjoys working with her hands. She cuts up old hats, for instance, to create tapestry ornaments, and has made beautiful candle holders and other household decorators items from bottle tops, glasses and other items "most people would throwaway."

She also studies languages. She speaks Spanish, English, French and Italian. French and Italian she learned with language study records in her home. She said her mother began teaching her Spanish after they moved to El Paso, as they did not think they had any need for Spanish when they were residing in New York.

An attractive brunette, obviously in the prime of life and making the most of every minute of it, Mrs. Ponce, when a child, memorized a line from Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" which has motivated her since:

"How dull to pause, to make an end, to rust unburnished not to shine in use, as though to breathe were life."

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Works For People, Civic Progress

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