

David L. Carrasco Gave Back to Hometown

By Ana Villela and Madison Simone Moore

When he was a teen, he had to enter the Hotel Cortez through the back door for his job as a busboy because he was Mexican. Decades later, he entered the hotel through the front door as Director of the Job Corps. In between, he had earned two college degrees, served in the U.S. Navy, coached a university basketball team to a national championship and had a career with the State Department in South America.

One of three children, David Livingston Carrasco was born in El Paso on December 29, 1919, on South Tays Street, just feet from the area in which the Chamizal National Memorial now is located. In an interview with Tom Hoggan in 1973 for the University of Texas at El Paso Institute of Oral History, Carrasco related that his parents came to the United States during their teenage years from Chihuahua, Mexico. He said that coming from poverty, his parents strived to furnish their children with educational opportunities.

Carrasco attended Vilas Elementary and El Paso High School. Throughout school, he competed in many sports including basketball, football, track and boxing. His family encouraged outdoor sports, and Carrasco, his brothers and cousins grew up in a competitive atmosphere. He developed a strong desire to succeed and later admitted to being a “ferocious competitor.” He obtained a bachelor of arts in education in 1943 from the Texas College of Mines, known today as the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), while being very involved in sports.

During the summers, Carrasco played for the Chihuahua Dorados, the national Mexican basketball team known throughout Latin America. He later received a master’s degree in education from the University of Maryland. In an Institute of Oral History interview by Magdaleno Cisneros in 1976, Carrasco revealed that he also had studied for a doctorate in education but did not complete the required dissertation.

Carrasco began his teaching career in the *Segundo Barrio* at Aoy Elementary as a physical education teacher. In 1943, the 6-foot-4-inch Carrasco became a physical education teacher and basketball coach at Bowie High School. Jim Conley reported in an article for the *El Paso Times* that Carrasco coached Bowie’s team to the Texas State Basketball Championship round “as a rookie ... coach.” This result of his competitive spirit and striving for excellence in his teaching and coaching would be repeated over and over as he worked with young people.

With World War II escalating, Carrasco decided to join the U.S. Navy, serving for about three years during the war. While in the Navy, he worked in Special Services, playing competitive sports and coaching. His main duty was recruit training, a job Carrasco likened to teaching. Carrasco was stationed in various places such as San Diego, Calif., Norfolk, Va., and Cambridge, Md. While in Maryland, he met and married Marjorie Partin. They had one son, David Lee Carrasco, currently a renowned professor of Latin American Studies at the Harvard Divinity School.

After being discharged from the Navy, Carrasco believed he would resume his coaching position at Bowie, but he had been replaced. The Carrascos returned to the Washington, D.C., area, living there until 1964. Carrasco went back to teaching and coaching, this time at a junior high school in Montgomery County, Md. Four years later, he went to the large suburban Montgomery Blair High School, where he led its basketball team to three state championships in five years. Then the successful coach became the athletic director and head basketball coach at



David L. Carrasco was the first director of the Job Corps Center in El Paso.
(Photo courtesy of the David L. Carrasco Job Corps Center)

American University, the first Mexican-American coach of a southern university.

According to *The Washington Times*, Carrasco took his American University team to three regional championships in eight years. This university was the first in the area to be racially integrated, so Carrasco early on recruited local black basketball players, beginning in 1956. Carrasco demanded that his athletes be dedicated to their sport, the key to his success, according to *El Paso Times* reporter Ruth Intress. In 1958, he was named NCAA Division II Basketball Coach of the Year.

The bilingual Carrasco traveled to Latin America during the summer beginning in 1959 to participate in a program sponsored by the State Department called “American Specialist.” He assisted American embassies in different capitals in Latin America and conducted clinics and conferences in physical education and basketball. Working in almost every South American capital, Carrasco counted these experiences representing the U. S. Government as one of the “highlights” of his life.

In 1964, Carrasco resigned from American University, where he was a tenured professor as well as coach, and joined the Peace Corps where he worked as the director of a youth development program in Ecuador. The Peace Corps was officially established by President John F. Kennedy on March 1, 1961. It attracted many young people to share their education and expertise with other, less fortunate people in many countries in the fields of agriculture, education, health and others. One of

Carrasco’s brothers headed the Peace Corps in Chile.

In the interview with Tom Hoggan, Carrasco said that he greatly admired President Kennedy and believed that the Peace Corps had another purpose of immense profundity: the fact that these volunteers “were going into foreign countries with a new concept of foreign service.” Carrasco added, “The Peace Corps was never very popular with the established tradition of the Foreign Service because the volunteers did not live in nice homes; they did not have money, they had very limited allowances; they lived in the poor areas, the barrios; consequently they worked right with the people.” He also said that the volunteers under his supervision were a great group of highly committed individuals. Carrasco worked for the Peace Corps for three years.

In 1967, Carrasco was appointed by the State Department to the position of Olympic Attaché at the American Embassy in Mexico City in preparation for the 1968 Olympic Games. He served as special assistant to the American ambassador and advised him on all Olympic issues.

Following the Olympics, Carrasco was transferred by the State Department back to El Paso. He was appointed a regional director of the U.S. Commission for Border Development and Friendship with Mexico, representing parts of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Carrasco told Hoggan that the commission was

established by President Johnson and was a bi-national operation between the Mexican foreign office and the U.S. State Department. The commission dealt with many different kinds of problems in education, commerce, agriculture, immigration, health and much more. In his interview with Cisneros, Carrasco said that he felt the commission brought fresh optimism to the prospect of solving the many problems between the United States and Mexico. Unfortunately, due to a shortage of funds, the commission was dissolved after one year.

The Department of Labor was set to open a Job Corps center in El Paso in 1970. The contract was given to the Texas Educational Foundation to establish and operate the center. It contacted David Carrasco and asked him to be the director of the center. As Carrasco told Hoggan, the Job Corps embodied “the concept of providing a second opportunity to youngsters who are economically and socially disadvantaged, and it is just wonderful.” According to the *Handbook of Texas Online*, published by the Texas State Historical Association, the original Job Corps was housed in the old Hotel Cortez in downtown El Paso, a homecoming of sorts for Carrasco who at one time had had to use the back door because he was “a Mexican busboy,” as Intress wrote in 1977.

The center opened with 50 students. Aged 16 to 24, they received technical knowledge and work experience which allowed them to acquire worthwhile employment upon completion. Students could choose from many different vocational programs such as automotive,

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is usually deep enough to enjoy at the top of Transmountain Road, a mile high in elevation.

In the early 1960s, while Bean was a front-runner in a U.S. Congressional race, he found himself in some legal hot water for failing to file his federal income tax from 1956 to 1960. Bean was convicted on five misdemeanor counts of failure to file, each with a \$1,000 fine. Jail time was suspended. He was forced to resign from his seat as county judge in 1962 and also resigned from the El Paso Bar Association.

One would think that this was the end of Bean's political career, but that wasn't the case. Bean was elected to the Electoral College in the late 1960s, and in 1972, he became chairman of the El Paso County Housing Authority. It was during his time with the Housing Authority that Bean attributed his greatest political coup when he was able to acquire \$50 million of impounded money from President Nixon, which Bean used to triple the amount of public housing in El Paso, from 2,000 to 6,000 units.

In a 1985 *El Paso Times* story on Bean, Scharrer wrote that Bean knew Texan Anne Armstrong, a special assistant to Nixon, and had backed a bill that benefited her family many years before. Armstrong was able to help her fellow Texan when no other state housing agency received such funds. Politics? You bet. In 1974, Gov. Briscoe appointed Bean chairman of a special advisory council for the state Housing Authority.

Harter wrote that Bean was always “on.” He craved publicity, good or bad. *El Paso Herald-Post* writer Richard Estrada wrote that Bean often said, “I don’t care what they print about me as long as they spell m’ name right.” When he was a reporter for the *Herald-Post*, Joe Old recalled a conversation with Bean’s good friend Malcolm McGregor, who accounted for Bean’s constant filing for office by saying that it was “glandular.” When the filing deadline came around, Bean didn’t seem to have control and his glands took over.

The career politician was elected to an important office again in 1974, this time to the State Board of Education.

He advocated higher teacher pay and smaller class size. He wanted El Paso's children to go to school together because they lived in the same neighborhoods, a major reason for his push for public housing. On July 14, 1985, Bean told the *El Paso Times* that he considered this election to be his greatest victory. "That's when I found out that people weren't mad at the judge anymore," he stated. "I knew they had forgiven and forgotten."

Bean ran for public office three more times but lost, despite his belief that he had been “forgiven.” In 1975, Bean ran for mayor of El Paso only to lose in a close runoff with Don Henderson. In 1976, he ran for railroad commissioner unsuccessfully. Then in 1982, Bean ran another unsuccessful campaign, this time for the Texas Supreme Court. Defeat at the ballot box never stopped Woodrow Bean from planning his next race, however, not even when he landed in the hospital. “I would like a last hurrah,” he laughingly told Sharrer in May 1985.

Bean was known for his three-pack-a-day cigarette habit, and this led to health problems throughout his life. His first heart attack came at the age of 36. In his May 1985 interview with Sharrer done while sitting in a hospital bed, Bean stated, “Had I known I was gonna live this long I would have taken better care of myself.” Lung cancer had struck the judge.

From his hospital bed, Bean gave advice to aspiring politicians. “Never get mad at anyone. You never get even,” he stated to Scharrer. “And do good for all of the people – that’s what politics is all about ... And you’ve got to pay your taxes.” The judge loved to laugh, and he did so, even in the hospital. He told everyone to ignore the “no visitors” sign on his door and he talked with numerous friends daily. “I’ve even had a couple bankers come to see me,” Bean joked, never having been a buddy of the establishment.

Bean reduced his smoking habit to about 15 cigarettes a day while in the hospital, and as Gary Sharrer wrote, promised to quit “tomorrow.” Bean lost his battle with lung cancer on July 14, 1985. On that day, former El Paso Mayor Fred Hervey and Bean’s adversary stated to the *El*

Paso Times that Bean was “an easy-going politician. . . . He was one in a million.”

The day after Bean's death, Richard Estrada, editor of Border Politics for the *El Paso Herald-Post*, wrote, "An era has passed." Calling Bean an "ally of Mexican American blue collars," among other things, Estrada said his personality consisted of "equal parts of compassion, ambition, courage and assertiveness." Bean was a staunch New Deal Democrat, who pushed for a decent county hospital for the indigent and adequate housing for the poor and elderly. He insisted that decent housing was necessary for students to finish high school.

Bean was a character. He was a big man with a bigger voice and people listened when he spoke. They may not have agreed with what he said, but they listened. As Estrada said, “‘El Frijol’ (the Bean) reveled in smoke-filled rooms, in convention halls, in the limelight of interviews and in the camaraderie of the Florida and Central Cafes in Juárez.”

The El Paso County Democratic Party honored Bean in April of 1999 with a video that chronicled his legacy. Don Kirkpatrick, producer and director of the video, told the *El Paso Times* in June 2002 that Bean was one of El Paso's most effective politicians. "Whether you agreed with him or disagreed with him, he did some great things," Kirkpatrick stated, "and there's just no denying that."

Woodrow Wilson Bean, Sr. was an old-time politician. Today, some of what he said and did might be considered politically incorrect, but no one could deny that he didn't produce results. Estrada wrote that Bean "loved his family, his country, politics, his friends, people in general, cigarettes, vodka ('put a lime twist in there: makes it taste just like lemonade!'), Stetsons and boots. In just about that order." N'uff said. ☩

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heating and cooling, welding, office administration, and nursing assistant, among others. General education courses were offered to those who wanted to obtain a GED, equivalent to a high school diploma.

According to the Job Corps website, not only does the program offer technical and general education today, but also drivers education and readiness programs. Courses in social and life skills are offered to help the transition to the workplace. The Advanced Career Training program is offered to students with the skills and motivation to succeed in college. Students attend classes at El Paso Community College while enrolled with the Job Corps. In 1979, the center moved to a five-acre campus on the east side, located at 11155 Gateway West.

Carrasco told Hoggan that the center here in El Paso had the greatest number of graduates compared with other centers in the United States. The Job Corps Center allowed Carrasco to return to his first love: teaching. In the article by Inness, Carrasco said, "Some

people say I now have a small town job compared to my more glamorous jobs with the State Department. But I view it as a big time job because I'm helping shape lives." Working every day and up to 60 hours per week,

he helped more than 9,000 low income students, mostly high school dropouts. He told Jim Conley, "I've always been for the underdog. The greatest emotion is when I see these kids doing well."

Besides job skills and other educational and life skills, Carrasco's students learned compassion. In one case, Carrasco and his students took in an abandoned dog they found tied to a tree with a chain. Named "Charlie," he became the Job Corps mascot and an inspiration to the youth who cared for him. Lorenza Jurado Franco, Job Corps alumnus, said that the students formed a "Charlie Club," charged with feeding and caring for the dog. *El Paso Times* reporter Luz Cruz wrote that students felt as if they were trapped by invisible chains and that Charlie reminded them that education was their way to break free of those chains. Charlie was the second animal to be inducted into the Animal Hall of Fame at the El Paso Zoo's Garden of Recognition.

Carrasco worked with the Job Corps until his death on



A mural on the Center's grounds honors Carrasco and the Job Corps, including their canine mascots. Note the statue of Charlie, the dog rescued by the Center's students. (Photo by Ana Villela)

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In 1907, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra appeared in El Paso and the Choral Club, comprised of more than 100 singers, was organized to participate in the concert, Kate Moore Brown among them. Cunningham wrote that the press declared the performance “a triumphant success.” Such was the level of national performers and local musicians as well as music lovers that El Paso now boasted. Moore also continued her successful career as an accompanist for many musicians in town, and she played piano and organ for several churches over the years.

Head of the Music Department of the Woman’s Club, Kate Brown offered the group her home at 519 Los Angeles Street for its meetings during the 1909-1910 club season, according to Cunningham. The group studied operas during the year and completed 14 by the time the year was out. This endeavor served to provide a rather elevated study of music not readily available anywhere else close by. It would be years before El Paso had a university and even more before the university had a music department.

Because of the Woman’s Club and trained musicians like Kate Brown, the city could appreciate and present fine music. In the spring of 1910, for instance, the Music Department under Brown sponsored Madame Ellen Beach Yaw in concert. “Lark Ellen,” as she was known, was an American coloratura soprano who took both her native country and Europe by storm, becoming the first American to make a successful operatic debut in Rome. She was able to reach and maintain the C above high C, thrilling audiences everywhere, including the packed house in El Paso.

Kate Moore Brown became president of the El Paso Woman’s Club in 1910, and all club meetings were held at her home, the Woman’s Club having no permanent building until 1916. Cunningham wrote that the club developed the Art Department during Brown’s presidency and the club staged a huge art show on the 179th anniversary of George Washington’s birthday, again at the Brown home. Guides to the exhibits wore colonial costumes, and art by famous artists was loaned to the club, including one Rembrandt, in addition to work by local artists, including club members. Having a major art show in a private home may seem strange to us today, but it’s important to realize that the development of the El Paso Museum of Art was still years in the future.

Members of the Music Department of the Woman’s Club continued to study the history of music and presented recitals by local musicians and other performers, making money for various projects as well as educating and entertaining the public. So successful were the members of the Woman’s Club in promoting music in public schools that opera was even taught to the young children of Lamar School, according to Cunningham. In 1915, 280 students from the eight grades formed the chorus as local vocalists took the major parts of Verdi’s “Il Trovatore” in a public performance.

Kate Moore Brown served on the building committee charged with starting the plans for a permanent home for the Woman’s Club, which included raising money

within the community. Ground was broken in May 1916 for what would be the first free standing building for a Woman’s Club in Texas. Gone would be the days when the club moved from building to building, room to room, sometimes several times a year. In order to buy furniture for the building, the club brought the famous Wagnerian soprano Madame Johanna Gadske to perform in the city. Her accompanist was Francis Moore, Kate’s brother.

In 1917, Kate organized a group of young women interested in music to form the first auxiliary of the Woman’s Club, the MacDowell Club, named for the American composer Edward MacDowell. This club would direct or be involved with almost every musical event in El Paso for decades. Kate Moore Brown chaired this auxiliary for three years and then served as honorary chair from 1921 to 1945. Membership in this prestigious group was by audition, and standards were kept high intentionally so that performances would be notable.

Such clubs are still found all over the country, a tribute to the MacDowell Colony, a retreat in New Hampshire whose aim was “to promote the arts of music, literature and the drama, architecture, painting and sculpture and the other fine arts; to encourage study, research and production of all branches of art; ... to broaden their influence; and thus carry forward the life work of Edward MacDowell,” words taken from the 1907 charter of the club. In 1919, MacDowell’s wife gave a piano recital for the local Woman’s Club.

In 1921, Kate Brown was elected to the El Paso School Board, serving two years, and being only the second woman to hold such a post. In 1924, the Woman’s Department of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce came into existence, although the larger group had been organized in 1899. And who was its first chairman-director? Kate Moore Brown, of course! Moreover, this new group was the first of its kind in the nation. Kate also became a member of the board of directors of the Chamber of Commerce, the first woman to do so. Having worked hard with all the projects, conventions and performances the Woman’s Club had sponsored and organized over the years, she knew her city well.

Among her many activities, Kate Moore Brown began the El Paso Music Teachers Association and helped organize the El Paso International Museum Board, having suggested the idea of an art museum in 1925. She was also director-general of the Pan American Round Table and a member of the board of directors



A woman riding a bicycle in 1892 in El Paso (not Kate Moore) is wearing bloomers, a controversial piece of clothing at the time. (Photo courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, Kohlberg Family Papers, MS369)

of the El Paso Public Library. She was appointed State Chairman of Child Welfare and to the state board of the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs and served as an adviser to the Junior League. In addition to her musical activities, Kate Brown Moore was an accomplished speaker and when a young member of the Woman’s Club asked, “What is your college, Mrs. Brown?” Mary Cunningham reported that Brown’s response was “The Woman’s Club of El Paso.” Nine years before her death in 1945, the *Herald-Post* called her the “mother of El Paso music.”

According to a 1936 *El Paso Herald-Post* article, William R. Brown had turned down several promotions within the Santa Fe Railroad because of the love he and Kate had for El Paso. William played the cornet in the McGinty Band, sharing his wife’s love of music. The couple traveled extensively over the world, and Kate had an impressive collection of fans and shawls that she had acquired during her travels. In 1936, William Brown died, shortly after the couple returned from China.

Evidently more people are learning about Kate Moore Brown today. A study of her life reveals that she was truly a pioneer and leader in music and the arts in the city and a woman ahead of her time. So influential was Kate Moore as a modern woman that a 2009 cycling blog by a young male cycling enthusiast in Canada briefly outlined Kate Moore Brown’s life, emphasizing her trailblazing use of the bicycle as transportation, and ended with these words: “I am currently working on a time machine that will allow me to travel to El Paso in the 1890[s] so I can marry Kate Moore.” 🚲

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October 16, 1990, from an apparent suicide after being on medical leave. More than 1,000 people attended a memorial for him at the Job Corps Center.

Carrasco received many honors and awards during his career of service. He was named to the El Paso Athletic Hall of Fame in 1978 and Outstanding Youth Educator of El Paso by the League of Latin American Citizens in 1980. He was honored as Citizen of the Year in 1981 by the Military Order of Foreign Wars. The mayor of El Paso gave him the Conquistador Award

in 1984 and the city named a street on the eastside after him in 1987. In 1991, he was nominated by the City of El Paso to receive the Lewis Hine Award for his outstanding service to youth. In 1998, he was inducted into the American University Hall of Fame.

One tribute that perhaps would have meant the most to him was the El Paso Job Corps Center being renamed in 1991 to honor him. It is now called the David L. Carrasco Job Corps Center. A colorful mural honoring him was painted by Carlos Rosas and “renewed” by the

late Benito Colorado, former art teacher and residential adviser of the Center, according to Franco. It is easily visible from Interstate-10 in both directions.

Carrasco’s love of sports and teaching highlighted his nearly 50-year career. He told Intress, “In sports, when running a race, everyone starts at the same line and finishes there. Whatever track record you have from another day doesn’t matter in today’s race. I guess that’s my philosophy of life and why I like sports—everyone is equal.” ♣