



# ERSILIA CRUZ



Ersilia Cruz was born in Turquillo, NM on October 28, 1930. She met and married George Cruz in 1947, and soon after relocated from New Mexico to Pueblo, CO. In the early 1950s, Ersilia and George moved to the west side of Pueblo where they settled in to raise their family. She loved the close-knit community and dedicated herself to helping those who lived there.

## LEADERSHIP

In the 1960s, "The War on Poverty" federal program gave Ersilia her first opportunity to get involved in improving the area. Through her hard work and dedication, she helped lead these efforts, which resulted in many water, sewer, and pavement improvements. Serving the Hyde Park community was what she and George had in mind when they opened G & E Grocers in the early 1970s which remained in operation until Kwik-Way Foods moved into the area. In time, she took a job with Kwik Way foods and moved into a management position at the store on 18<sup>th</sup> and Lambert and spent many hours giving

## Community

back to the community by serving as an interpreter and assisting seniors manage their utilities.

With a desire for education and determination for success, Ersilia went back to school and graduated from Centennial High School in 1972. Throughout the years, she was actively involved at Hyde Park Elementary (currently César Chávez Academy), serving on the PTA and many other programs. Although there were many efforts by Ersilia and community members to keep Hyde Park Elementary open, it was eventually closed and remained vacant for years. In preservation of the Hyde Park community and through continuous work by Ersilia and other community members, the Pueblo Library District opened a satellite library branch in October of 1997 at the former Hyde Park Elementary. Several years later, Ersilia would play a vital role in bringing life back to the school.

## Dedication

With her assistance, César Chávez Academy (CCA) charter school opened its doors in 2001, giving children from all over the city of Pueblo an opportunity to receive an education in a challenging, caring, and diverse environment. In 2004, Dolores Huerta Preparatory High (DHPH) opened alongside CCA to allow students to expand their educational opportunities not only at the high school level, but also at the college level by earning college credits through the Early College Program. By this time, Ersilia had grandchildren of her own attending CCA and DHPH and she continued to volunteer at the schools in many different areas.

## Education

Throughout all of this, her love for her community never wavered. She was at the forefront of numerous projects and battles to preserve and improve the living conditions in the area, from preventing a private prison opening directly across Pueblo Blvd, to keeping a trailer park from moving in. This led her to get involved with Neighborhood Housing Services in the development of a multi-million dollar, single housing, mixed income community development: Hyde Park Gardens. In 2003, the City of Pueblo named a street within the development in her honor: Cruz Court. Ersilia was very humble, but proud and excited for the honor. In addition to this, she served on the Community Development Block Grant Committee, which helped to install handicap-accessible sidewalks and a drainage pond on 18<sup>th</sup> Street. She was also involved with another grant to redo the sidewalks and create safer walkways on the 18<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge. In addition, Ersilia also managed and ran the Hyde Park Community Center, where she served as the President of the Hyde Park Neighborhood Association.

## Perseverance

## DETERMINATION

At the community center, Ersilia established adult educational programs, a lunch program, and exercises classes for seniors. She was also active in garnering support from multiple community agencies for a much needed renovation of the community center. Her involvement was crucial in the redevelopment and improvement of the neighborhood park, which was rededicated in her name on October 28, 2006, one month after her death.

## Service to Others

Representative John Salazar dedicated October 28<sup>th</sup> to Ersilia Cruz and recognized her lifelong dedication to her community on the floor at the Colorado House of Representatives. In addition, she was recognized by the YWCA with the Anne Taussig Woman of the Year award in 2003, and the Neighborhoods Dorothy Richardson Award for her outstanding community leadership and commitment to revitalizing America's neighborhoods and was recognized on the local and national levels.

In honor of Mrs. Cruz's efforts to improve the educational opportunities for Pueblo's youth and the Hyde Park community, the middle school at Chávez/Huerta K-12 Preparatory Academy was named Ersilia Cruz Middle School in 2018 to continue *Building a Legacy of Success*.