

## Celebrating Gallup Hispanic Culture: Three seniors share memories of yesteryear

Written by Story and Photos by Marley Shebala Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 08 May 2015 01:07

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There was a time when Gamerco was bigger and more affluent than Gallup.

There was also a time when the Gallup High School mascot was the tigers and not the Bengals.

And there was a time when milk was bottled in glass and delivered to your front door.

Huge blocks of ice were also home delivered.

Those are some of the memories of three life-time residents of Gallup, who are all in their late

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70s.

Archie Baca, who is the former owner of Jerry's Café and current owner of Don Diego's restaurant, remembered the words of his late dad, Diego Baca, when he told him that he was getting married and moving back to Gallup.

His dad, and mom, the late Margaret, had moved from Gallup to Grants, where his dad delivered bread for Rainbow bread company to the eastern part of the Navajo reservation, which was had unpaved roads like most of the state and country.

"I remember when I told my dad that I was getting married and moving back to Gallup," he said. "He was really happy. He told me that Gallup was the place to make a living for me and my children. He was right. Gallup is a great place."

Archie said Gallup also continues to be a place of mixed cultures.

"As a kid growing up here it didn't matter what you were," he remembered. "We all played together."

Archie was born in Springerville, Ariz., where he remembered roaming "free" on the land.

He also remembered that his family's home lacked electricity and running water. But they had an outside water well. There was also a river near his family's home.

"We had a great life," he recalled with a huge smile. "We were free to go anywhere as long as we didn't break any house rules."

And one of the core house rules was school.

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“School was a must,” he said.

But that didn’t include high school because not everyone had the opportunity to attend high school.

“Graduating from high school was a plus,” Archie said.

And he said if your family was wealthy, you would attend college.

His family eventually moved to Gallup when he was still a boy.

He recalled one day in 1945, when he was playing with a bunch of his friends in the area where Junker Bridge is now.

“All of a sudden, we heard sirens and bells ringing,” Archie said. “We got kind of scared and we ran home because we didn’t know what was going on.”

When he got home, he found out that the sirens and bells were ringing to announce the end of World War II.

As he talked about more boyhood memories he looked around his restaurant and said that his friends were Hispanics, Indians, Anglos and other races.

Gallup was a mixture of cultures he said and it continues to be that way today.

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“Of course, there were and are rivalries but people get along,” he said.

On the walls of Don Diego restaurant are beautiful colored photos of the Navajo Code Talkers and young Navajo teens carrying a huge American flag.

Most of the restaurant patrons are Navajo people.

Cecil Baca, Archie’s son, said that he loves listening to the cultural stories shared by their Navajo customers.

Archie and Cecil said that some of their Navajo customers are now the adult-grandchildren of former Navajo customers who have “passed on.”

The color photos, which are from the annual Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial spark another memory from Archie.

“I remember when the Navajo people would come to the Inter-tribal Indian Ceremonial in covered wagons,” he said. “It was a beautiful sight.”

Archie lamented the relocation of the ceremonial ground to Red Rock State Park, which is about 10 miles east of Gallup, because it took a lot of business away from the downtown area.

The mall and large retail businesses have also taken business from downtown but at least there’s an effort to revive the downtown area, he added.

“Gallup has gone through a lot of changes and so has our way of life,” he said.

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The way of life that Archie remembered was kids spending most of the day playing outside instead of indoors watching television and, or playing electronic games.

He also remembered riding with dad as his dad delivered bottled milk to the front doors of homes.

His dad would have to make milk deliveries really early during ceremonial time to avoid all the traffic, Archie said.

And he said when our family and other families went shopping, we didn't take what we wanted off the shelves.

We'd tell the store clerk behind the store counter the item on the shelf that we wanted and the clerk would get it for us, Archie explained.

He sighed and said Gallup has its ups and downs but it's still a great place to live.

It was May 5 when the Gallup Sun interviewed Archie and May 5 is Cinco de Mayo.

One of the downtown business was hosting a Cinco de Mayo celebration but not the Don Diego restaurant.

Archie said that Cinco de Mayo is a celebration for Mexico.

"We're from over here," he said. "We respect the people of the Mexico that way."

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He added that the food served at Don Diego is New Mexican food and not Mexican food.

“There’s a difference,” he emphasized.

At the North Side Senior Citizen Center, a few of the people wished each other a happy Cinco de Mayo day.

Johnny Espinosa was one of them.

Espinosa, who lived in the same area of Gallup where he spent his childhood, said Gallup never celebrated Cinco de Mayo.

When Gamerco was bigger than Gallup, Gamerco would host an annual 16<sup>th</sup> day of September celebration, he said.

Espinosa explained that Sept. 16 marked the day when Mexico began its fight for its freedom from Spain.

But he said when the five coal mines closed that surrounded Gamerco and Gallup, Gamerco stopped having the annual September event, which included a contest that involved contestants loading coal.

The contestants, who were coal miners and a mix of cultures, that loaded the coal first won, he said.

He also sadly recalled that the Gibson coal mine fire killed a lot of Chinese because it was mostly Chinese men that worked there.

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Espinosa said that Gamerco also had a swimming pool before Gallup.

He said that Gallup got its name from a railroad paymaster named Gallup. He couldn't remember the first name of Gallup.

He remembered, "People would ask each other, 'Where you going?', and they'd say, 'Going to Gallup.'"

And when he heard that the Gallup Sun had interviewed Archie Baca, he smiled and said that he played high school baseball and football against Archie.

Espinosa also remembered that the Gallup High School mascot was the tigers and not the Bengals.

The mascot name was changed because there were a lot of other high schools that had the tigers as their mascot, he said.

"We figured that Bengals were bigger than tigers," he added with a laugh.

"We played in the dirt and the field was lined with white lime. You'd get a face full of lime if you fell on the line," he said.

Espinosa also remembered that the Gallup high school football field was the ceremonial grounds.

And when the football game was in Grants, it was played in the rodeo grounds, he said.

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“The last game of the season was at Fort Wingate and there was four inches of snow,” he remembered. “We froze! We were covered in mud.”

Espinosa said he still has a photo of himself from that game.

Melba Chavez-Jarzomkowski, who was listening to Espinosa, said she remembered walking to school in the snow.

There were no buses and our family car was used to get our parents to work, she said.

Espinosa said that he had to walk cross the railroad tracks to get to school and if the train was going across the tracks, he’d be late to school.

“I’d tell the teacher about the train and some days, I’d get the paddle or I’d get an excused tardy,” he said.

Chavez-Jarzomkowski said she lived on the south side of Gallup and so she didn’t have to walk across the train tracks.

Her childhood memories of Gallup included the home delivery of a huge block of ice, which her parents put in the ice box or refrigerator.

Her parents also had to put a huge pan under the ice box to catch the water that dripped from melting block of ice.

She and her parents moved to Gallup after she was born in Cubero, N.M., which is near the



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Pueblo of Laguna.

After she explained that her family considered themselves Spanish and not Mexican or Hispanic, Espinosa said that his late parents both came from Mexico.

“I’m not sure why some people don’t like to be called Mexican,” he said. “There are no pure blood Spanish people. When the Spanish came over here, they didn’t bring their women. They were with women from here, American Indian women, and that’s the Mexican people.”

He added that his boyhood friends, high school classmates, especially team mates and rival sports teams, consisted of all kinds of races.

Sam Florence, a Navajo elder sitting at a nearby who was listening to Espinosa, teased him and said he was a better football player than Espinosa.

Florence said he met Espinosa in high school in 1952.