Martha Zollinger, who for the past half century has been one of the best ambassadors Gallup has ever seen, passed away of natural causes just a few days before her 98th birthday.

After spending most of her early life in Ohio and Louisiana, she moved to Gallup in 1964 with her husband, John, and three children Jack Bob and Mary Ann. Her husband had just purchased the town's newspaper, the *Gallup Independent*.

From the moment she came to town, she began making friends with her cheerful attitude and a desire to make the city a better place for all who lived here. She did this by becoming a lifelong volunteer.

During the next 50 years or so, she donated more than 25,000 hours of her time to a wide variety of programs and organizations in the area. If there was a need, she was more than willing to step up and volunteer her time.

A number of years ago, the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce recognized her for her many hours of helping out. She was also a member for years on the Chamber's Yeis.

Former Gallup mayor John Peña remembered a time in 2002 when he was mayor and the Navajo Tribal government asked the city to help run an exhibit it was sponsoring at the Winter Olympics then being held in Utah.

He put out a call for volunteers to travel to Utah to help the tribe and one of the first people to respond was Martha Zollinger.

"What a great ambassador for Gallup she was," Gallup's current mayor Louis Bonaguidi said.

The board for the Rehoboth McKinley Christian Hospital agreed, giving her a "Citizen of the Year" award for her many years of service as a volunteer at the hospital and for her dedication to patients. For many years, she would go around Gallup collecting books she would then give to patients.

In 1999, the University of New Mexico Gallup Branch gave her its Distinguished Citizen award for her "extraordinary service to the campus."

She and her husband also made a sizable contribution to help fund the construction of the school's library. To show its appreciation, the college named it the Mary Ann Zollinger Memorial Library.

This was in honor of her daughter who died while she was a student. She had gone running after lunch one day and collapsed. Her death had a major effect on members, but none more than Martha.

Her friends would say she went into mourning for several years and they believed that her decision to spend a lot of her waking hours volunteering was an effort to not have to think about her daughter's death.

She and her husband would take a number of trips to Mexico and Panama to help out with charitable efforts there.

She also acted as an ambassador for the *Independent,* often going to people who came under attack on the paper's editorial page.

Peña, who came under severe criticism during the time he was mayor, said the attacks on him by the paper had no effect on their relationship. "We have always had a good relationship," he said.

For decades, it was common to see her in her red Mustang around noontime with a pile of newspapers in her hand, taking them to the senior citizen centers and other locations to sell no matter what the weather was.

She loved playing bridge holding regular bridge dates with her friends. She and her husband, who died in 2007, were active members of the Plateau Sciences Society, attending the regular monthly meetings and going on trips with the other members.

As for a hobby, she said when she had time, she would create stuffed animals which she would. give to children at the hospital and the battered women's center.