

St. Jo graduate has held important public offices

Antonio Garza, a 1977 graduate of St. Joseph Academy, earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from the University of Texas in 1980, and his law degree from Southern Methodist University in 1983. After graduation from law school, Garza returned to Brownsville and for several years, in addition to coaching Junior High and Junior Varsity basketball at St. Joseph's Academy, practiced law with two other St. Joseph Alums, Reynaldo Garza Jr. ('62) and David C. Garza ('65).

In 1988, Garza announced his intention to run for Cameron County judge and became the first Republican elected in South Texas in more than 150 years, and the youngest judge in the state at that time. In the mid-1980s, Garza struck up a friendship with George W. Bush, who as governor in 1994 named Cameron County's young judge as Texas' 99th secretary of state.

In 1998, Garza would go on to seek statewide office on his own and won a seat, and later serve as chairman of the Texas Railroad Commission, becoming the first Hispanic Republican ever elected to statewide office in Texas.

But President George W. Bush would call on him again and, in 2002, appointed him U.S. Ambassador to Mexico. Garza began his service in Mexico as the youngest U.S. ambassador abroad, and he went on to be among the longest to serve as ambassador to our neighboring country.

Garza says matter of factly, "I don't know where I'd be without St. Joseph, but I sure wouldn't be where I am. St. Joe allowed me to start developing a sense of purpose."

He recalls that from a very early age he was drawn towards the tradition, a sense of something larger, something special that St. Joseph offered. Garza explains that "I started my schooling at Sacred Heart Elementary. And although St. Joseph was no longer part of that downtown campus, we knew that we were being prepared for that, whether it be in the classroom, or on the playing fields."

Garza goes on to say, "My sister DeAnna had attended Villa Maria and been a Bloodhound cheerleader, and I just knew that St. Joseph's was for me."

By the time 1971 would roll around, Garza would be entering the 7th grade. The summer after that first year as a Bloodhound he'd lose his mother to cancer. He recounts that as being "an awfully tough time for both Nicky ('79) and I. But for six years, the Brothers, lay teachers and staff were like family. And boy, were we a handful."

Garza notes that while he was less than the ideal student, to this day he can't use certain words without thinking of Brother Donald Nugent's daily vocabulary quizzes, or reflect on what it means to be both gentle and tough without recalling Brother Kevin Brogan's "quiet, steely resolve."

And now living in Mexico, how could he forget Brother Marcos Longoria's Spanish classes. But he reserves his most fond memories for Coach Ted Gray, whom he characterizes as a "Dutch Uncle" who "gave me hell," but had a loving, caring, decent and generous soul.

"It's safe to say that Coaches Ted, Meme Garza ('68), Miguel Ortiz ('70), and Jesus Amaya, simply weren't going to let me get away with too much," Garza said.

The former ambassador mentioned that he still visits the campus about once a year, generally alone.

"It grounds me, reminds me of what's important, as well as who I am and how blessed I am to be part

of such a great tradition,” Garza said.

Garza, now practicing law with a large global law firm in Mexico City sits on numerous corporate boards, is a member of the Development Board at the University of Texas and president of its Exes Association. He also serves as a trustee at Southern Methodist University and past advisory council member to the dean of the School of Public Health at Harvard University.

The former ambassador has been named a distinguished alum at both the University of Texas and Southern Methodist University and awarded the “Aguila Azteca,” the highest honor the Mexican government bestows upon a non-citizen of that country. In 2013, St. Joseph Academy named Garza a distinguished alum.

At the time he told friends, “This one’s different. To be honored by the people who know you best, who were such a large part of who you are. All I can say is that I’m grateful and humbled.”

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