

## **Edward Lujan –Major Contributor to the Arts**

Anyone who has seen an art show or experienced a performance at the National Hispanic Cultural Center of New Mexico in Albuquerque knows how architecturally impressive the complex is. But the creative work going on inside is just as notable.

NHCC's well-planned, soaring art gallery features thoughtfully curated exhibits ranging from the antique Spanish to the modern Latino. Three state-of-the-art theaters offer venues for everything from orchestral concerts to films, plays, and conferences.

A superbly renovated former elementary school on the grounds has ample office and curatorial space as well as a restaurant devoted to Hispanic cuisine. And New Mexico artist Federico Vigil is painting the interior of the 40-foot torreon that greets visitors with a mural celebrating Spanish culture through the centuries.

Many people play major parts in the center's ongoing success, but Edward Lujan must be regarded as first among that group of equals. He has been involved from first thoughts to planning, from fundraising to groundbreaking, and now from opening to operation. He served as president of the center's board from 1995 until this spring, when he was named chairman emeritus.

Not that Lujan wants special recognition. "Nobody lives in a vacuum, so it wasn't just me," he said modestly. "I was just fortunate enough to be in a position where I could help." That help meant being one of the groups of people who secured almost \$20 million in state funds, \$14 million in private donations, and almost \$18 million in federal money for NHCC. And his personal commitment to the project, which took time away from his work as chief of the Manual Lujan Agencies, his family's nearly 80-year-old insurance company, has been extensive.

"What happened historically, in 1983, we began the Hispanic Cultural Foundation," he recalled. "We wanted to preserve the culture. Our youngsters were beginning to lose the language- once you lose that, you begin to lose the customs, the culture, and all that. We raised some money and put together a program; while the program was going on; we raised a little more money. It was a cycle."

As the foundation's projects grew, the need for an established facility became plain. First, Albuquerque's city government became interested. Then came state support, federal support, and private donations. "We felt that this ought to not just be public [financing], that it ought to be a partnership between the public sector," said Lujan, an Albuquerque resident. "It turned out to be just that.

"In my mind, you have three things when you're about a culture. You've got the language, you have the food, and you have its art- whether it's performing, museum, literature, whatever. It needs to be shared. The center is not just for Hispanics. It's there to share a beautiful culture, a beautiful language. There is no center in the country quite like this."

-Craig Smith