

blood & sweat & salsa!

Jose and Diane Cuevas prove that hard work and perseverance do pay off

By Nancy Aguirre

For most people 25 years represent many things but for Jose Cuevas, founder and president of Jumburrito, it represents a milestone as the Mexican food restaurant chain celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary.

With six restaurants in Midland and Odessa and 115 employees, Cuevas is one of Midland's most prominent businessmen. His success is a result of years of hard work and perseverance.

Growing up in a family of ten in Kingsville, Texas, Cuevas faced prejudice and the struggles of living in the barrio. Periodic visits to the wealthier areas of Kingsville taught him to "strive for a better way of life."

Cuevas and his wife Diane opened Jumburrito in December 1979, in Midland. "Diane and I have always worked side by side," Cuevas said. "When we [opened Jumburrito], we just wanted our own little business."



The first restaurant opened in Midland and had fewer than ten employees, and everything was made by hand including the tortillas. The second restaurant opened in 1981, and the third opened in Odessa in 1986.

Running the business has not always been easy. Cuevas faced one of his greatest challenges during the oil bust of 1986. "I didn't know how I would pay my bills," he said, but he kept "working hard and [kept] his nose to the grindstone."

Meanwhile as other restaurant-owners lowered their prices, Cuevas raised Jumburrito's prices because of the "high quality of their products."

Cuevas' approach worked and over the next 15 years Jumburrito expanded to its present total of six restaurants. Jumburrito is now a prominent business in West Texas and this success has opened doors for Cuevas giving him the opportunity to serve the local community in numerous ways.

"I always dreamed of being around important people and getting



(above) Jose, Tomasa, & crew celebrate Jumburrito's 1st anniversary on December 5, 1980.
(left) The modern era Jumburrito.



involved in politics," Cuevas said. On the walls of his Midland office photographs of Cuevas with President George W. Bush, Vice-president Dick Cheney and Governor Rick Perry are displayed.

Cuevas has served on the Midland City Council. He currently serves as a board member for the Midland Community Bank and is the chair of

"It's not about us, it's about how we can help other people," he said. "Jumburrito has afforded me that opportunity."

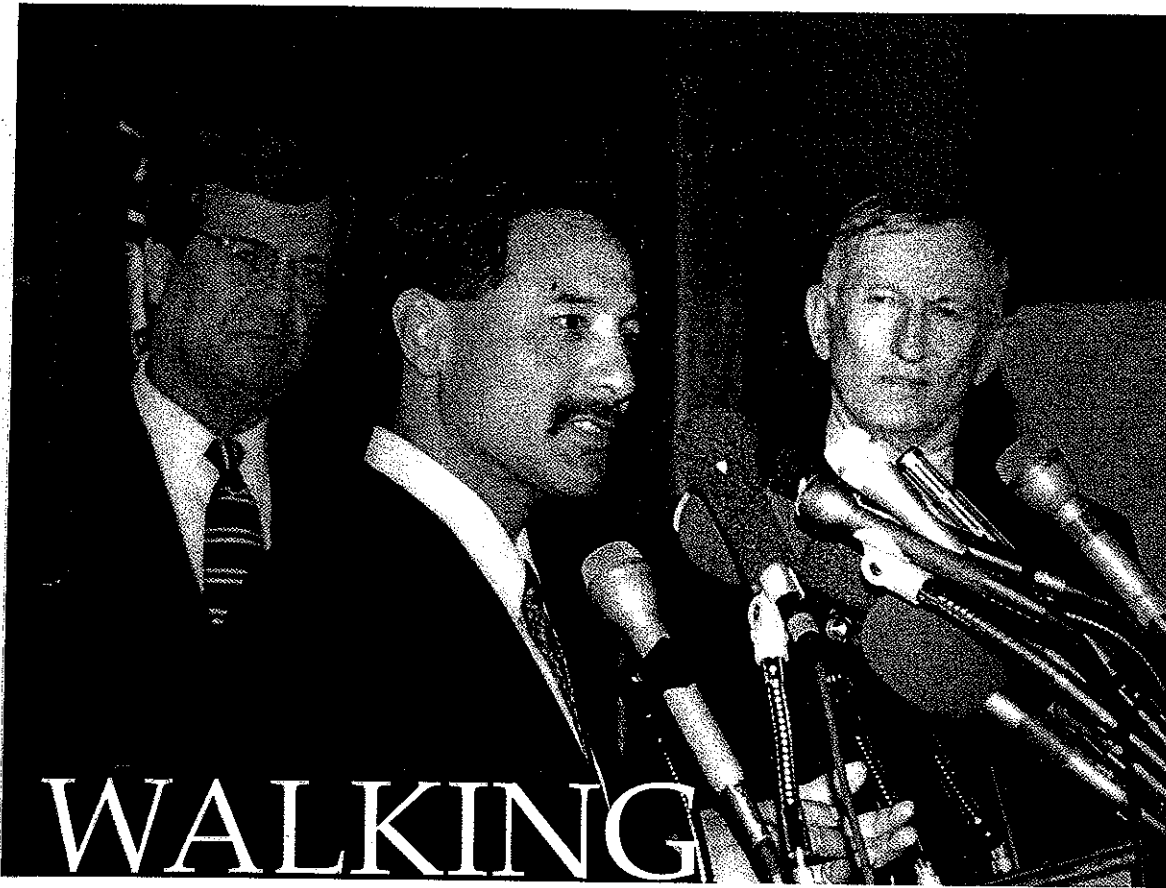
HOPE (Hispanics for Opportunities to Progress in Education). These are only a few of the leadership positions Cuevas has held and he always keeps a single goal in mind, "I preach diversity in leadership roles," he said.

He added that it is important "to give back to the community." Cuevas counsels young businesspeople and Jumburrito is a contributor to the United Way. "It's not about us, it's about how we can help other people," he said. "Jumburrito has afforded me that opportunity."

Cuevas may soon have the opportunity to work in communities outside of West Texas. "We're in the process of getting ready to franchise," he said. His goal is to have 50 Jumburrito restaurants in the next five years. He hopes to expand in the southwestern states and eventually make Jumburrito a national restaurant chain.

As he reflected upon the past 25 years, Cuevas said that numerous factors contributed to his success. His love for automation has helped Jumburrito increase food production and maintain company efficiency. But his greatest success has nothing to do with automation.

According to Cuevas, his greatest success is "learning to balance family and business." He and his wife have three children—Sarah, Morgan, and Eric. He said that although he usually receives "all of the glory," his wife has worked with him 100 percent. Together over the past 25 years, they have fulfilled Cuevas' personal motto: "See it, believe it, achieve it." NC



(left) Senator Trent Lott, Senator Jafford and Jose Cuevas on the Senate floor. (below) Jose and his wife, Diane.



WALKING the TALK

Jose Cuevas has come a long way. Born in the Barrio in Kingsville, Texas on February 15 1957, Cuevas encountered some powerful prejudice while growing up. His background made him stronger and more determined to be successful.

When Cuevas was just 22 years old, he and his 20-year-old wife Diane started up the Jumburrito restaurant in Midland, Texas with a \$5,500 bank loan and pots and pans bought on credit.

Today, Jumburrito is one of the Permian Basin's most successful restaurant operations, with five locations and a sixth location to be added soon. "I constantly set goals and work like mad to achieve them and I am totally committed, because without commitment there is no success," Cuevas says. His sense of commitment is apparent when looking at how he got to where he is today.

"I truly learned this business from the ground up," he says. "My first job in the restaurant business was setting up tables and chairs at the Regency Hotel in Denver. I then worked my way up the ladder at several other restaurant jobs across the country until I felt ready to pursue my dream of setting up my own business, which I did on December 5, 1979. The rest, as they say is history."

In addition to his restaurant duties, Cuevas is a civic activist. He served as council member-at-large for the city of Midland for 10 years and was the driving force behind several city projects and accomplishments.



He was Midland's United Way 2000 campaign chairman, which successfully raised and exceeded all prior years of giving. I am forever grateful to the many, many, wonderful volunteers and the generosity of this community that made this possible," he said.

Cuevas is also active at the state and federal level. He has met with presidents, senators, governors and state representatives. He is U.S. Rep. Henry Bonilla's (R-TX) Midland Campaign Chairman, and also has traveled to Washington, DC to participate in a press conference held by Senate Majority Leader, Trent Lott (R-Miss) and Sen. Jim Jaffords (R-VT) on minimum wage.

Other noted awards and accomplishments; 2000-2001 Texas classroom teachers association friend of education award, 1999 mason "community builder" award, named 1996 Hispanic Businessman of the Year for Region III (Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas and Louisiana) by the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and also by Texas Association of Mexican American and the Midland Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, 1993 Midland YMCA volunteer of the year. He has also completed four marathons (Chicago, New York, and two in Las Vegas).

"Being recognized for achievement is always nice, but it's in the achievement itself that the rewards lie," adds Cuevas. "I am grateful for the blessings God has bestowed on me, my family and the great nation we call the USA."