

ARIZONA *Our history* LATINA *Our story* TRAILBLAZERS

Stories of Courage, Hope & Determination

Trailblazer Series Vol VII





Rebecca Rios

Advocate for the Underrepresented



A fourth generation Arizonan with roots in the Hayden-Winkelman mining community, Rebecca Rios is one of only a handful of Latinas to serve in the State Legislature in the past 25 years. Rebecca has played a critical role in serving as a voice for her community and for underrepresented groups on important issues. She has become an advocate for accessibility to healthcare, family services, and education, and has pushed for equal treatment for the immigrant and LGBT communities. With the mentorship of her father, former Arizona Senator Pete Rios, she has developed into a role model who encourages younger generations to demand a place at the table in the political process.

The Rios family began their story in Hayden, Arizona, in the little barrio of San Pedro. Pete Rios met Gloria Mendoza in high school and they married in 1966. A year

later Rebecca was born. Rebecca spent much of her childhood in Phoenix, while her father and mother obtained their college degrees and went into their respective careers—Pete at the Department of Economic Security, and Gloria into nursing.

By the early 1980s, Pete delved into state politics and eventually ran successfully for the Arizona Senate. He served in the state legislature for 26 years. At an early age Rebecca received exposure to political participation. As a little girl, she marched alongside her father on anti-war marches or grape boycott protests. As a teen and leader of Pete's junior volunteers, she engaged in grassroots campaigning in central and southern Arizona. While in high school, Rebecca moved with her parents back to Hayden-Winkelman so her father could represent that district of the state. A sister, Danita, and brother, Peter Jr., joined the

family. Rebecca graduated from Ray High School in 1985.

Rebecca initially attended Central Arizona College, where she graduated Valedictorian. She obtained a Bachelor's degree in Social Work from Arizona State University, and then pursued a career in the field of children's behavioral health.

Motivated by her passion for children's welfare and issues of social and economic equality, in 1994 Rebecca ran for her father's previous seat in the House of Representatives as a Democrat, representing primarily Pinal County. She won the election and served three terms in the House of Representatives. In the early 2000s, she left politics to pursue a Master's Degree in Social Work at ASU.

Rebecca returned to public service in 2004 with a bid for the Senate, representing the 23rd District. She remained in the Senate for three terms. During her second term, her colleagues elected her Minority Whip. She continued that leadership role in her third term as Assistant Minority Leader. Meanwhile, her district gradually transformed from a rural, largely Democratic base with roots in mining, ranching and farming, to expanding

suburban communities with a growing Republican presence. In 2010 Rebecca lost her bid for a fourth term in the Senate.

Not one to back down, Rebecca picked up the charge again in 2014, this time to represent District 27. She won, and again her caucus members voted her into the position of Minority Whip, a testament to her strength and leadership. In 2015 she is the highest ranking Latina in the House of Representatives.

Rebecca has served on various boards focusing on services such as Head Start, domestic violence assistance, and public health. She has adroitly juggled her social work career, public service in the State Legislature and with community groups, and her role as a mother to three children, Diego, Milan and Van. She is married to Van Janerette.

Rebecca has received a number of honors for her passionate community service, such as the 2011 Valle del Sol Rosa Carrillo Torres Humanitarian Award. Rebecca's key position as a political leader allows her to serve as a role model for other Latinos, providing inspiration for what they can achieve in their own lives.

The Raul H. Castro Institute (RCI) is proud to have a role in preserving the significant contributions made by the 2015 Arizona Latina Trailblazers. This vision of the the Raul H. Castro Institute is to improve the quality of life for the Latino community in Arizona by bringing focus to priority issues of education, health and human services, leadership, and civic engagement – all areas in which these Latina Trailblazers have created a tremendous and lasting impact. Through the use of this book in educational settings and through its availability as part of the Arizona Memory Project, their legacy will be perpetuated as generations of leaders continue to be inspired by the spirit and actions of these pioneering women. It has been a privilege to tell their stories.

To learn more about the lives and achievements of the 2015 Arizona Latina Trailblazers, please visit

www.azlatinatrailblazers.com

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Latinas' Stories Remain Important in Arizona's History

As educators, social workers, labor leaders, entrepreneurs, scholars, judicial representatives, homemakers, nurses, ranch wives, or political representatives, Latinas and Hispanas have long been at the forefront of Arizona's history. It is important that we recognize the impact of their individual contributions, and imperative that their collective stories be recalled and shared.

The life journeys of these women are filled with compelling stories that reflect the strength of their vision, their courageous actions, and their thoughtful advocacy. Their outstanding leadership formed strong cultural cornerstones, laying the foundation for women in leadership roles today.

And so we honor them and all that they represent, pioneers who forged our rich cultural heritage and strong role models.



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