

ARIZONA *Our history*

Our story **LATINA**

TRAILBLAZERS

Stories of Courage, Hope & Determination

Vol V





Anna Tovar

Inspiring Others Through Courage



The path to the Arizona Legislature for Senator Anna (Solorio) Tovar included unexpected twists and turns. Anna traces her roots back to 1930s Tolleson, Ariz., when the Bustamante family arrived from Mexico. The farmworker family eventually established John's Market, operating the store for 50 years. The youngest of five siblings, she lived in a close-knit neighborhood filled with relatives. Anna spent many hours in John's Market, observing how her grandfather quietly provided store credit to struggling families. She learned that although her grandparents were not wealthy, they grew rich in friendships that lasted a lifetime. Her elders taught her the value of hard work, and the importance of serving others.

With these values as her foundation, Anna graduated from Tolleson High School in 1992. She joined the first class of students

at Estrella Mountain Community College, and married her high school sweetheart, Juan Carlos Tovar. After completing her degree in elementary education at Arizona State University, teaching kindergartners and first graders at P.H. Gonzales Elementary School became her passion. Adding to her joy were her sons, Juan Carlos and Xavier. Anna spent long hours with her students; rewards came with a child's smile or pride in learning something new. She joined the teacher's union, advocating for changes in the schools.

Anna's emerging leadership caught the attention of Mayor Adolfo Gamez. He had known her since elementary school, and seen her potential even then. He encouraged Anna to run for City Council. Hesitant at first, she decided to take on the challenge. Still in her mid-20s, she learned how to campaign. In a very close race, Anna beat the incumbent candidate by 11 votes! She joined



the Tolleson City Council in 2001.

Anna's life changed dramatically just months after joining the Council and starting a new school year. Doctors diagnosed Anna with a rare form of leukemia, informing her that without a bone marrow transplant, she would die. With two young sons, a classroom of students, and a new career in public service, Anna arrived at a defining moment in her life. Would she live? With resolve, she traveled the grueling path to recovery, after her brother miraculously provided a bone marrow match. Circumstances required her to give up teaching, so she threw her passion into serving on City Council. Her family, community, and involvement in city government kept her strong, even when she faced the return of cancer a year later. Yet once again, she beat the odds; underwent a stem cell transplant, and recovered. She eventually served as Tolleson Vice Mayor.

Anna's experience with cancer strengthened her resolve to give back to her community, and inspired courage to take bolder steps. At the age of 35, in the midst of a campaign for reelection to Council, Anna secured an appointment to replace State Legislator Steve Gallardo, representing

District 13. She joined the State Legislature in 2009. Anna immediately focused on health care and education, areas within the state budget targeted for major cuts. Through her leadership and advocacy, Anna preserved transplant funding for AHCCCS recipients, saving many lives. Before long Anna accepted the position as Minority Whip, coordinating voting in the Democratic Party and advocating for proposed bills. In 2013 Anna gained a position in the Senate for District 19, chosen again as Minority Whip, thanks to her collaborative leadership style. Through her recent work in the Latino Caucus, Anna focuses on critical issues such as immigration and civil rights.

As a young Latina who has shown great courage, Anna serves as a role model to her community and its youth. Her story, which is far from over, will inspire others to take risks for their beliefs. She is a rising star, with potential to embrace greater opportunities for public service. Anna has received many formal awards for community service. Yet it is the thanks from her constituents that reaffirm she is on the right path—steadfastly following the advice of her grandfather, to never forget from where she has come.

Arizona Latina Trailblazers: Stories of Courage, Hope & Determination
Trailblazer Series Vol V

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Thank you to the following sponsor for making this project possible:

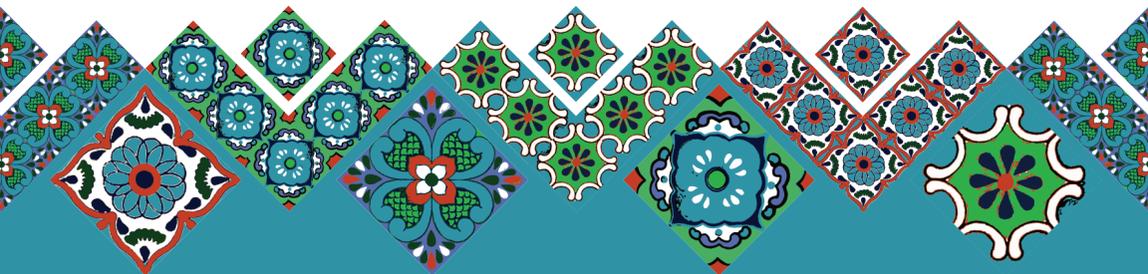


Latinas' Stories Remain Important in Arizona's History

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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