

A U S T I N C I T Y C O U N C I L

AGENDA



Thursday, May 25, 2006

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#21

**Parks and Recreation
RECOMMENDATION FOR COUNCIL ACTION**

Subject: Approve naming of the Medina Street Plaza, located between East 5th and East 6th Street and South of the alley, as the "Roy and Matias Velasquez Plaza." (Related to item 11, 18-20 and 22)

Fiscal Note: There is no unanticipated fiscal impact. A fiscal note is not required.

<p>Additional Backup Material (click to open) D Roy and Matias Velasquez Supporting Documents</p>
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For More Information: Ricardo Soliz, Division Manager 974-6765

Boards and Commission Action: Recommended by the Parks and Recreation Board.

The Parks and Recreation Department received a request on January 26th, 2006 to name the Medina Street Plaza for Roy and Matt Velasquez. The City of Austin Public Information Office began the official process for nominations to name the facility in February, 2006. The deadline for submitting nominations was March 17, 2006. Only one application was received: 1) "Roy and Matias Velasquez" by John Michael Cortez & Isidoro Lopez, Board of Directors of Austin Latino Music Association. The Parks and Recreation Board met on April 25, 2006 and recommended the Medina Street Plaza be named "Roy and Matias Velasquez Plaza." The vote was 6-0. The Medina Street Plaza recommended to be named for Roy and Matias Velasquez is one facility out of a series being recommended to celebrate a trail for Tejano Music Legends.

The Medina Street Plaza is located between East 5th Street and East 6th Street and South of the Alley in vacated right-of-way. The area is currently undeveloped but funding is available for improvements to the area.

APPLICATION FOR FACILITY NAMING

We, John-Michael Cortez and Isidoro Lopez, members of the board of directors of the Austin Latino Music Association (ALMA), request that the names listed below be considered for the corresponding public facilities:

(A) Name the Mexican American Cultural Center located at 600 River St. for the Perez and Ramos Families that include among them the band leaders Ruben Ramos, Alfonso Ramos, Ruben Perez and Ernest Perez.

(B) Re-name Festival Beach Road located just North of Town Lake and just East of I-35 for the band leader Nash Hernandez.

(C) Name the Fiesta Gardens Pavilion located near the Western boundary of Fiesta Gardens at 1901 Bergman St. for the band leader Johnny Degollado.

(D) Name the Fiesta Gardens East Meeting Hall located at 2101 Bergman St. for the band leader Manuel "Cowboy" Donley.

(E) Name the Town Lake Scenic Overlook located near the intersection of Canterbury St. and Pleasant Valley Road for the band leader Roy Montelongo.

(F) Name the Medina St. Plaza to be built on the Medina right-of-way located between E. 5th St. and E. 6th St. and South of the alley for business and civic leader Roy Velasquez and band leader Matt Velasquez. Roy and Matt Velasquez are brothers.

Ruben Ramos, Alfonso Ramos, Johnny Degollado, Manuel "Cowboy" Donley and Roy Montelongo have all been inducted into the Tejano Music Hall of Fame. The Nash Hernandez Orchestra is the longest running big band in Austin and has been performing in Austin for more than 50 years. Matt Velasquez is a 50's era band leader, and his brother Roy Velasquez was the founder of Roy's Taxi, the only Latino-owned taxi cab company in Austin.

Biographical Synopsis: Refer to Attachment 1

Individual's Involvement in the Community: With the exception of Roy Velasquez, the individuals whose names are being recommended for naming the noted public facilities are important Latino musicians and families in Austin who helped establish Austin as the Live Music Capitol of the World. Roy Velasquez was a local entrepreneur and civic leader who helped establish the Austin Chapter of LULAC in 1935 and very active in local politics.

Please refer to Attachment 2(A) – 2(F) for additional information about the families and individuals for whom the specified facilities are proposed to be named.

2(A) Perez & Ramos Families

2(B) Nash Hernandez

2(C) Johnny Degollado

2(D) Manuel "Cowboy" Donley

2(E) Roy Montelongo

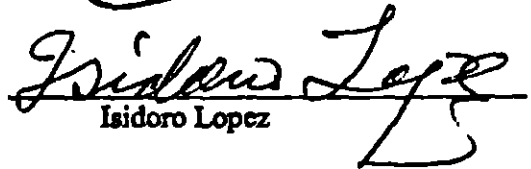
2(F) Roy & Matt Velasquez

Individual's Connection to the Facility: Ruben Ramos, Alfonso Ramos, Ruben Perez, Ernest Perez, Manuel "Cowboy" Donley, Roy Montelongo, Nash Hernandez, Roy Velasquez and Matt Velasquez all lived in central East Austin where all of the proposed facilities to be named are located. Several of these artists still live in that area. Johnny Degollado has lived in the Montopolis community/neighborhood all his life and has hosted the Austin Conjunto Festival at Fiesta Gardens for more than 10 years. Roy Velasquez established Roy's Taxi in the early 1930's and for many years operated his business on the block adjacent to the proposed Medina St. Plaza.

ALMA will work to identify funding for signs and plaques if it is deemed necessary by the City of Austin.

Submitted to the Parks and Recreation Department this ^{26th} ~~25th~~ day of January, 2006.


John-Michael Cortez


Isidoro Lopez

ATTACHMENT 1

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS FOR FACILITY NAMING PROPOSAL

(A) PEREZ-RAMOS FAMILIES

The Perez – Ramos Families have a long musical tradition that stretches back several generations. The two families are connected by brothers Don Louis Perez and Don Tranquilino Perez. Don Louis Perez and his wife Trinidad are the parents of Elvira Perez who is the mother of Ruben Ramos and Alfonso Ramos. Don Tranquilino Perez and his wife Carolina are the parents of Blas Perez who is the father of Ernest Perez and Ruben Perez.

Ruben Ramos, Alfonso Ramos, Ruben Perez and Ernest Perez have all led their own Tejano orchestras. Ruben and Alfonso have often performed and recorded together. Many of Ruben and Alfonso's brothers were and continue to be members of their musical groups. In recognition of their accomplishment, Ruben Ramos and Alfonso Ramos have both been inducted into the Tejano Music Hall of Fame. As a member of Los Super Seven, Ruben Ramos is a grammy award winner.

Accomplished local musicians such as Alfonso Ramos and Manuel "Cowboy" Donley played with the Ruben Perez Orchestra early in their careers. In addition to leading his own orchestra, Ernest played in his brother's orchestra for many years as well as other local groups such as Johnny Degollado and Los Cinco Reyes.

(B) NASH HERNANDEZ

The Nash Hernandez Orchestra, Austin's longest running big band, has been playing big band, swing and Latino styles of music for generations of fans throughout Central Texas. Nash Hernandez fell in love with the big band style while in the Army during World War II. When he returned to Austin, he worked with Matt Velasquez before starting his own band in 1949. In 1975, Nash Hernandez was named Ambassador of Goodwill by Governor Dolph Brisco for whom he had performed in 1973 at the Governor's Inaugural Ball. He was also recognized for his musical contributions by the City of Austin in 1975 and 1993, by the Texas Senate in 1993 and by Vice President Al Gore in 1994. Nash Hernandez passed away on June 26, 1994, but the band continues to perform under the direction of Nash's son, drummer Ruben Hernandez, who began playing with the group at the age of eleven.

(C) JOHNNY DEGOLLADO

Johnny Degollado is the premier conjunto accordionist, band leader, and song writer in Austin and the surrounding areas. In 1952, at the age of 15, he started his own conjunto along with his neighbor, Vicente Alonzo, who still is a member of the conjunto. Johnny studied under Camilo Cantu, another important conjunto band leader from the Austin area. Cantu also taught Johnny to tune and repair accordions. Johnny has composed more than 200 songs, and he is the event coordinator for the Austin Conjunto Festival that has been held in May for the last 20 years. He was inducted into the Tejano Music Hall of Fame in 1986.

(D) MANUEL "COWBOY" DONLEY

Manuel Donley is considered a pioneer of Tejano music. An accomplished musician, arranger and composer, Manuel Donley is well respected by his musical peers. In addition to fronting a Tejano orquesta, he also performs in traditional "Trio" and "Mariachi" ensembles. Manuel Donley has also composed and performed for movie soundtracks. He has taught guitar lessons at Huston-Tillotson College and still gives lessons at his home. His orquesta, Las Estrellas, is famous for its tight horn section as well as for the many different styles of music they played such as boleros, rancheras, polkas, rock-n-roll, rhythm-and-blues, big band-swing, etc. Manuel Donley formed his orquesta in 1949 and continues to perform with them occasionally.

(E) ROY MONTELONGO

Roy Montelongo is an original Tejano legend who started playing in his teens with the legendary orquesta of Beto Villa. He then went on to play with the orquestas of Isidro Lopez and Alfonso Ramos before forming his own band. One of his first picks for a sideman was Agustine Ramirez. Roy Montelongo recorded many hits and toured nationally. His unique singing style and his accomplishments as a saxophonist and arranger brought him much acclaim. Roy Montelongo recorded over 20 albums and was selected to be an original member of "The Legends" of Tejano music along with the likes of Freddie Martinez and Sunny Ozuna. Eventually, he settled on broadcasting as a career and for many years was heard on the Austin airwaves.

(F) ROY & MATT VELASQUEZ

Matt Velasquez' Latinaires, that pre-dated Little Joe's Latinaires by several years, performed from approximately 1946 to 1959. Vocalist-guitarist Matt Velasquez was a member of several ballroom bands including "Big Poppa's Band," the group with which he started playing when he was 14 years old. After returning from the service in 1946, he formed his own band, playing sorority parties, debutante balls and major parties. He also donated services to all Catholic churches. Matt Velasquez and his band played for the grand opening of Palmer Auditorium in 1959. He worked with Eduardo Martinez and Emilio Caceres. His brother, James Velasquez, played drums.

Roy Velasquez is an important local Hispanic businessman and community leader. He established Roy's Taxi in 1931 at the age of 21 when construction jobs dried up in the years following the great depression. He started the business with one car and within a year had 35 cars working for him on a contract basis. The company was located in various locations in and around East Austin, but in 1957 he moved the company to 90 East Avenue where the business headquarters remain today. Roy was active in political circles since his early years in business. He sold the poll tax to help minorities gain a voice in government. He also was active in supporting many political candidates and was a friend of leaders such as President Lyndon B. Johnson, Mayor Tom Miller, City Council Member Emma Long, Judge Homer Thornberry, and Congressman Jake Pickle. In 1935, Roy was co-founder of the Austin Chapter of LULAC, Council 85 and was one of the charter members of the Austin Citizen's League which was organized in the mid-1960's.

ATTACHMENT 2(F)

Roy and Matt Velasquez

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Matias Martínez Velasquez

COUNCIL MEMBER
MATT ALVAREZ

Matias (Matt) Velasquez was born on February 24, 1921 in McNeil, Texas to Gilberto and Porfiria Martinez Velasquez. He was raised on the greater east side of Austin at 1908 Holly. During the time he was in the Armed Forces, the Velasquez family moved to 704 E. 11th across the street from the old Bickler school.

During his time in the military, Matt entertained the troops during World War II. He was stationed all over the Pacific and Alecian Islands. He entertained the troops with songs from the Big Band era, such as Glenn Miller, Jimmy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, etc.

In the 1940's, Matt formed a band, and called it the Latinalres. Some of the prominent latino musicians, who got their start in his band were, Nash Hernandez, Dave Gutierrez and Ernest Perez. Matt's own brother, Santiago Velasquez was the drummer in this band. Other musicians in the band were John Cherico and Jack Poffer, who were in the service and stationed at Bergstrom Air Force Base. Matt's band, at times, consisted of musicians, who attended the University of Texas.

Mr. Velasquez enjoyed his music after his retirement he would entertain friends and family. He was involved at his local church by singing in the Men's Choir Group at St. Mary's Cathedral.

He was well-know in Austin and the band played for many social events, such as the Headliners Club, Skyline Club, debutante balls and inaugurations, aside from the club dates in and around Austin. He continues his association with well know Austin musicians, Ernie Mae Miller.

He was married to the late Maria de Jesus (Susie) Flores Velasquez. Their family of 4 sons and 4 daughters were all born and raised in Austin.

ROY MARTINEZ VELASQUEZ, SR.
(January 6, 1910 – November 11, 1981)

Biography

Roy M. Velasquez, Sr.

"I get the most satisfaction when I help people. I'm glad I can do this."

Roy Velasquez sums up his life with these comments, and judging from his record of 71 years, he should be a satisfied and happy man. A list of those he has helped—whether the, great or the nameless—could be as long as the miles he has driven in over 32 years at the steering wheel of his taxicabs.

Roy's Taxi had its start as an act of desperation by the 21 year-old Velasquez when construction jobs dried up in the opening days of the Great Depression. He brought to this new enterprise a determination to succeed, with the leadership skills he learned in the hard labor of pipeline construction.

The son of Gilberto and Porfiria Velasquez, he was born January 6, 1910 at McNeil in north Travis County. His parents immigrated to this country from Monterrey, Mexico, where they had met and married. Gilberto Velasquez, often called Gil, worked in a steel mill in Mexico. Velasquez' grandfather had immigrated to Mexico from Spain, and his grandmother was an Aztec Indian. His father died in 1932, and his mother died in 1963.

When his horse died, Velasquez quit school after two years. The school was five miles from McNeil, at Merriltown. The town included a church, a cemetery, a school, and a grocery store. Because of the long distance, his mother bought him a horse and saddle for \$10.

"I rode the horse for several days, and then we had a big snow. When we came out of school, we saw buzzards flying all around. We ran to the field, and found the horse had died, and the buzzards had to carry the saddle home. My mother had bought the horse on credit and she still had to pay it out."

His mother bought the horse from a neighbor family named Brock. Velasquez recalls that Henry Brock was the last man hanged in Austin. Brock had killed his wife, stabbing her seventeen times. He was hanged on the vacant lot on 10th Street north of the Travis County Courthouse, where the bus station was later built.

"Back then," said Velasquez, "they didn't mess around with you. You do something bad, vamanos."

Velasquez' father worked for the Austin White Lime Company, owned then by A.H. Robinson, Sr. Velasquez became a favorite of Robinson, and would wait for hours to carry the man's suitcase into the store, for which he earned the first quarter of his young life.

Later he helped Robinson with the payroll, and would seal the pay envelopes as the owner put the money in them. Velasquez received a quarter every two weeks for this work.

"I used the first quarter to buy a chicken, then I bought a rooster, then every time he give me a quarter, I buy another chicken. The first thing I know, I got 40 chickens."

In Round Rock, Velasquez often did odd jobs for the Swedish neighbors. The Swedes spoke little English, as did Velasquez, but the first English word Velasquez learned, came from a Swedish neighbor. The word was 'biscuits', because two homemade biscuits were his pay for the odd jobs he did for them.

"If a little boy is ambitious, somewhere down the line he's going to do something. I was very ambitious—for dinero."

At age 14, Velasquez followed his father into the labor pool of the lime company. He was paid \$4 a day, for 12 hours a day, seven days a week.

Dynamite, used at the lime plant, was the cause of an injury and tragedy for Velasquez at Round Rock. A dynamite cap exploded, claiming two fingers of his left hand. He was one of nine brothers, but four died as infants. By 1927 when Velasquez moved the family to Austin, he was accustomed to hard work and long hours. From a number of major construction companies, he gained experience, demonstrated leadership, and became foreman of projects in Austin, as well as in Dallas. Velasquez settled his family in a small house at 302 East 15th. "I had to make it," he said. "I had my mother, my father, and four brothers—Julius, James, Matt, and Pete."

His first construction job was at Comal and Pedernales Streets, where his crew built a stone wall. He later gained experience laying storm sewer pipe, and as foreman, once hired 10 men out of 2,000 applicants at 20 cents an hour in the West Lynn Street area. The hours were 8 a.m. to 5 p. m., six days a week. This was toward the end of 1920's and all a day jobs were getting scarce. He was being paid \$2.00 a day.

Velasquez bought his first house in 1930, and it is still in the family today. He paid \$1,300.00 for the house at 1908 Holly, which had three rooms, plus, 1 bath, a kitchen and a long porch. He made a \$13 down payment and paid \$13 a month.

As construction work slowed down, Velasquez was offered a job project in Kingsland. The construction company he worked for in Dallas asked him to organize a crew and to go Kingsland to build cabins for the crew to live in while they quarried granite. Velasquez put together a crew in Austin and drove to the job site. A leader in that community told Velasquez and his crew to leave before 5 o'clock or the townspeople would move them by force. Sure enough, that evening a crowd of about 60 men, armed with pistols, rifles, shotguns, and machetes, came to the job site and ordered them to leave. Vamanos. Velasquez brought his men back to Austin, called the company in Dallas to explain the situation, and forgot about working in Kingsland.

This incident illustrates the drastic action people were prepared to take to defend jobs during the Depression. Velasquez decide to go into the taxi business. Why? "Because it was the only thing left that was open."

At age 14, Velasquez bought his first car, a 1924 Model T Ford, a rumble seat, for which he paid \$525, at \$150 down and \$25 per month.

In 1930, he bought another car, for a new one to be the foundation for a new job and a lifetime career. He paid \$450 for a 1928 Model A Ford, tudor.

In December of that year, the construction companies closed down, and there were few jobs.

Tiring of the odd jobs that were available, Velasquez went to the owner of the "Ten Cents Taxi," one of the many taxicab operators in Austin, and who had some 30-40-taxi cabs in operation. He asked for a job, but was refused and told, "You would run off my clientele."

It was not the first or the last time that Roy Velasquez would confront race discrimination—but none of those times left him with bitterness.

"I learn to defend myself through the hard way," he said. The hard way was to start his own taxi company. Two men became important to Roy Velasquez that day: John A. Basford and Braulio Reyes.

On April 5, 1931, at City Hall, Velasquez found out from John A. Basford, clerk in the clerk's office, that the permit he needed to operate a taxi would cost \$3.00. He then approached his friend Reyes, who had \$20, and asked for a \$5 loan.

Velasquez tells his story:

"I went to see Braulio and I told him, Braulio, I need five dollars. He said, what you going to do? He thought I wanted to buy some food. I said, No, I want to go into the cab business? What do you know about the cab business he asked. I told him I don't know, but I wan tot get into the cab business. So he said he had \$20 and was going to let me have \$5. Five dollars in them days was about five hundred dollars now. A whole lot of money.

That man was always pretty close to me when we used to put in big pipe. He was close to my side."

"In them days there were so many cab companies, and all of them used some kind of tens in their name. There was Ten Cents Taxi, the Big Ten, the Ten Penny Taxi, the Dime Taxi, So many that I didn't have any room to get in. So I just put Roy's Taxi.

Roy's Taxi was a success from the beginning for a number of reasons, but probably none more important than that he offered a needed service. There were literally hundreds of taxis operating in Austin at the time, and all of them would take a passenger anywhere in the city for a dime. The city limits were at 45th Street on north; Live Oak on South; West Lynn on the west and Chicon on the East.

One of his first experiences concerned the need to know the locations of city streets. A customer hailed him at his Sixth Street at Chicon Headquarters, and asked to go to 1111 Salinas. "I just put him in and I didn't know Salinas Street from the Man in the Moon. The first thing I thought was that it must be in the area of Santa Rosa because all those streets have Mexican names, so I took him over there. I couldn't find no Salinas Street there. Coming back I asked Santos Buratti at the filling station, where is Salinas Street, and he said it was right there at the top of the hill. I spent a dime's worth of gas looking for that place, and it was right there on top of the hill. I will never forget that."

So Roy Velasquez kicked off a 50 year tradition with one car, borrowed money, and a borrowed telephone at a service station at Sixth and Chicon, where he paid seven cents a gallon for gasoline. And he had a plan.

The taxis of that day would not carry black passengers. The minorities rode the trolley cars, and the track ended at Sixth and Chicon. Velasquez selected the service station at the end of the tracks for his headquarters.

When trolley passengers arrived late and missed the trolley, Velasquez would solicit their business and carry them to their destination. The trolley charged a nickel,

and Velasquez charged a dime, but that wasn't as important as getting to work on time for the minorities who needed a ride. Inclement weather worked in his favor as well; rather than wait in the rain or cold, many trolley passengers would decide to ride with Velasquez. Picking up his first customer at the end of the line, he would usually pick up others along the route.

From the start, he began contracting with his passengers, picking them up at their home in the mornings, and returning them home in the evenings. He has passengers riding his taxis today who have been his customers for 50 years.

Within a year, Velasquez had 35 cars working for him on a contract basis under the Roy's Taxi banner. Between 4 a.m. and 8 a.m. each day he was carrying 400 customers to work. For the depths of the Great Depression, that represented a handsome income.

Also in 1932, Velasquez replaced that original car, and the next year he acquired a second car and employed Placido Beltran to drive it, paying him 40% of the fares he collected. Nicknamed "Clark Gable," he drove a Roy's Taxi for 7-8 years.

Another major event in his life that year was his marriage to Alicia Ortegon. They were married in 1932 at Georgetown. The couple was favored with 11 children: Mary Louise, Roy Jr., Rosa, Carmen, Clara, Gilbert, Esther, Carlos, Richard, Annabelle, and Robert. All the boys, and one daughter, Carmen, are involved in their father's business today. Roy Velasquez has 27 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. His wife died in 1962.

His success with the trolley passengers did not go unnoticed by the company's management. Rather than become involved in legal problems with trolley company, Velasquez moved his headquarters in 1932 to another filling station, this one at Sixth and Lydia. The parking area was too small here, however, and he moved in 1933 to 1005 East 6th, where his business took another major step forward.

Roy Velasquez ordered his first telephone and hired his first employees-- dispatchers. The telephone number was 25124 and cost him \$5 per month. He paid his dispatchers \$2.50 per week, for eight hour days, seven days per week. Frances Herbert and Frances Robinson were the first employees, and later he employed three sisters who worked for him many years. They were Dora, Virginia, and Aurelia Caballero.

The contract drivers for Velasquez paid him 25 cents per week to use his company name. He made enough from this source to pay the salaries of the dispatchers.

The business prospered through the Depression years, but World War II brought problems. First, he had trouble getting drivers. Most of the young men went away to war, and his business did not return to normal until armistice. Although he had some problems with gas and tire rationing, it was never serious enough to affect the business as badly as the loss of drivers. He operated only five cars during World War II. Buses took the place of trolleys, but the change had no effect on his business. After the war, Velasquez moved his business again, in order to get his living quarters and business in the same location at 704 East 11th. In 1957, he made his final move to 90 East Avenue, where his home business headquarters have remained until this day.

Velasquez was a driver in his company until 1962, when he went into semi-retirement. He retired officially in 1980, but he still kept a steady eye on the business.

Today, Roy's Taxi has 50 permits, half of the cars owned by the company and the other half by the drivers. Although he has been closely identified through the years with political figures and has been active in political circles since 1935, Roy Velasquez has never held political office, by election or appointment, except for a brief term as precinct chairman.

"I was always a Democrat, and I was a liberal back when everyone was either a liberal or a conservative. But when liberals got too far to the left and the conservatives got too far to the right, I became a middle of the roader. Long time ago, it was either liberal or conservative, but after the War was when this middle of the road thing was born."

Velasquez cut his political teeth by selling the poll tax. Given the times, the only way minorities could be heard was through the ballot box, and the only way into the ballot box was with a poll tax. So Velasquez and his friends began getting people interested in voting, by selling the poll tax. On one day, they sold 3,000 poll taxes at \$1.75 each.

Their goal, of course, was to get the people interested in participating in elections.

"People used to appreciate it more when they pay the poll tax," he said, "I don't think people worry now about voting since it is free."

Through the years, he has known personally most of the leading political leaders of the city, county, state, and nation. From the late President Lyndon B. Johnson to the late Mayor Tom Miller; from Councilwoman Emma Long to Senator Chavez of New Mexico; from Judge Homer Thornberry to the late President Harry Truman; from Federal Judge Reynaldo Garza to Congressman Kiko De La Garza.

He speaks with pride of his friendship with these many noted personalities and how he has helped and been helped by most of them. Velasquez has countless stories to make his points, and all of them are based on a personal, professional, and political loyalty. This, in fact, is a guidepost for most of his relationships with his fellow man, and he has been unswerving in his dedication to it.

At the state level, he goes back to Pappy Lee O'Daniel and his successful race for governor, then senator. Velasquez worked in those campaigns, and for every Democratic governor since.

He had his differences with the late Mayor Tom Miller, until a party meeting was held in San Antonio during the Truman presidential campaign. Mayor Tom asked Velasquez to introduce him to Henry Gonzalez, which he did, and the two were fast friends until the Mayor's death.

"I believe President Harry Truman was a president. Like anyone, he makes mistakes, but everybody have to make mistakes."

"I met Lyndon B. Johnson when he ran for Congress the first time. When I used to be down on 1005 East 6th Street he come by there and talked to me and my brother Julius. He said he want some help, and we asked him what kind of help he wanted; we got no money; we broke."

Johnson had seen Julius playing the guitar and he asked the brothers to get a band together and go with him to the small towns of Central Texas. They did, and Congressman Johnson was elected.

"I worked for Lyndon then, and until he died," Velasquez said.

"Lyndon was a man who say 'yes' and mean 'yes'. He never said 'yes' and mean 'no'."

Velasquez worked for Judge Homer Thornberry, beginning when he was on City Council, and through all of his later campaigns.

He has been strong supporter of Congressman Jake Pickle and Don Thomas, and he recounts numerous stories of mutual assistance between the two over the years.

Velasquez said in a story about a Bastrop judge seeking an appointment: "You come to me and I do things not because of me but because people, friends of mine, help me to do these things." It is a political fact of life that Velasquez honors highly.

Velasquez made sure another friend's brother was taken home safely from the bars he frequented, on a regular basis.

Another story of compromise regarding a presidential appointment involved John Connally, Ralph Yarborough, and Lyndon Johnson. Velasquez played a key role of bringing the warring factions to the point that Judge Jack Roberts won the nod. "I knew him from when he was Justice of the Peace," Velasquez said.

Velasquez was one of the charter members of the Austin Citizens League, which was organized in the mid-1960's to screen City Council candidates and make political endorsements. It represented a cross section of the community.

"The reason I like that organization was because we meet every week. We were good. You had to get some good people to run the city. People who could really understand. In them days, you pay your own way; you buy your own cigars and cigarettes."

In 1935, Velasquez, his brother Julius, Nash Moreno, and Henry Moreno organized the Austin chapter of LULAC, Council 85. LULAC lead the successful fight in 1947 in the Bastrop school discrimination case, *Delgado vs State of Texas*.

He was one of the early members of PASO, and another time joined with blacks to organize a political action committee. These were statewide groups with wide appeal, but faded when the memberships became sharply divided.

"In any political organization," he said, "You got to have 90 percent of the vote to be in control. But when you have 51 percent going one way and 49 percent going the other, it is too weak."

"I used to get people organized. Nobody is going to give you something for nothing. Either you see the politician's face, or there is no use to vote."

A lot of cab companies started out during the history of Roy's Taxi Company, but only three others are left today and most of them have been sold a number of times. Why did Roy Velasquez survive?

His words: "I have my father and my mother and four brothers; and I had to make a living for them. They depended on my. I have, like you say, the determination to get forward. In business, you have to be patient; you have to be able to take. If you are not flexible you are not going to get nowhere. You think people are going to do what you want all the time, you are wrong."

His success, however, can best be measured, then as now, by his explanation:

"In them days, very few people had telephones, especially in this part of town. People used to say, "Roy, pick me up at 3 o'clock in the morning" and I would be there to pick up a call for 10 cents. My business was always dependable with the people."

Could someone today, take one car and build a business like Roy's Taxi Company?

"No," he said, "I don't think so. You have to be hungry to do it. People born since 1940, they have silver spoons in their mouth."

Velasquez has been on the short end of race discrimination. Have race relations improved in 50 years? "Yes, a whole lot. "Some complain because they don't want to work. I fight for my people, whether black, brown, or white. If they are right, I fight for them. No question about it." he said.

"Everybody has feelings, but not everybody understands that. I always respect people and I demand the same thing."

"Everyone has a right to dream, a right to think, and a right to straighten himself out."

Velasquez said he always tries to help anyone who comes to him, and over the years, has given assistance to many. This has been a major satisfaction to him, because he had no one to help him when he was starting out. Although granting favors now and again, he never accepted any payment, although it was offered on many occasions.

To make the point: several years ago, the operator of a one-cab operation came to Velasquez and asked for a job, explaining that the city was going to take away his permit. Velasquez told him yes, he could work for him, but first he was going to make sure that the man did not lose his permit. Then, if he still wanted to join Roy's Taxi, he would be welcome.

Velasquez went to Mayor Lester Palmer and explained the situation that the man was a small operation and needed to work. The Mayor asked Velasquez to speak to the council, which he did, and it was decided the new ordinance did not affect the man, because he had been in business before it was adopted. The man did not lose his permit. He did not join Roy's Taxi, either.

Taxi competition has always been keen, and one of the bigger companies once tried to buy Roy's Taxi.

Velasquez was still driving then, and was asleep when one of the company representatives called on him. The offer was \$20,000.00 for the business, and Velasquez would get a \$500 a month job. He threw the man out, telling him the business was not for sale; that he didn't have enough money to buy it.

Many times he was told that some big company was going to put him out of business.

"Roy, you had better start wrapping your tamales because we are going to put you out of business," a driver told him.

"I'm already broke," Velasquez replied.

There is another side to our world that is not so well known, and Velasquez said "You know everything when you get into the cab business. Working all hours, you know who is going where and when. If a driver wants to make conversation, you can find out a lot."

Some of the things Velasquez has seen challenge even the credulous. "I don't try to explain them; I just tell you what I see," he said. Here, then, is a sampling of some of those stranger things that have happened after dark in Austin.

There was a lady who called for a Roy's Taxi every night except Fridays, and she called Velasquez' number, No. 47. She was tall, dressed in black with gloves and a veil, so that he could not see her face. He picked her up at 2205 Martha, but there was no house there, just a chimney, as the house had fallen down. He always took her to a

two-story house on Glen Oakes, and she would call for him to pick her up the next day. Every time she dropped the two dimes in his hand (fares had gone up by this time), he would feel cold chills.

He told his friends about the woman, and one of them said nobody believes you, Roy. So he invited the man to come along the next time. This time, she asked Velasquez to wait while she went inside. After a long time, he told his friend to go see what was keeping her so long. He took a flashlight and went to the house, returning to tell Velasquez that there was no one in the house and that it was filled with spider webs. Velasquez then went back to the house with him, but they could find no one. As they started back to the care, they heard a sound like chains rattling. But when they returned to the house, the chain rattling stopped. This happened every time they attempted to approach the house.

"That's enough of this," Velasquez said, and they left.

After the chain-rattling incident, she changed destinations. Each night, she would have Velasquez drive out Rosewood Avenue, and as the taxi neared the railroad tracks, she would vanish. Every night, as the cab crossed the tracks, vamanos.

Velasquez' friend told other people about the woman, and a few nights later, when the woman called for No. 47, Velasquez had another passenger. This friend wanted to see the woman, and he brought along a gun.

His friend was determined not to let the woman leave the cab, and he sat watching her as the cab moved along Rosewood. As they reached the tracks, his friend hollered, fired the gun twice into the floor of the cab, and fainted. Sure enough, the woman was gone.

Velasquez returned to the office, and they poured cold water on his friend, who started jumping and hollering when he awakened.

He told this story:

As he watched the woman, he suddenly saw nothing but bones through the veil and then it turned to fire, she vanished, and he fainted. She never called Velasquez again.

"Well," Velasquez said, "if you was hungry like I was, you didn't turn down any fares."

Another time, he picked up a Mexican-American woman and her daughter, taking them to 1609 West 10th. The girl could not walk. At the destination, the woman asked him to help get the girl into the house. As they reached the top step of the porch, the girl started floating into the air. The mother screamed for him to hold her and not let go. A black woman came out of the house, said two words, and the girl floated down and walked normally into the house.

Velasquez was told to wait 10 to 15 minutes for the mother and daughter, and when they came out of the house, the girl was laughing and talking as if nothing had happened. He returned them to their home on Concho Street.

He said he used to take many people to those who practiced witchcraft.

In 1942, he had a call from a woman at 1712 Rosewood who wanted him to pick up a passenger there at 12 midnight, and take her to 4th Street at Sabine, and wait for her. He said he would charge \$50 per hour, and the woman agreed.

When he got there, the woman asked him into the house and pointed to four sacks of shoes. She told him to put them into the cab and take the passenger and shoes to 4th and Sabine, where a train was going to pass by shortly after midnight. She said the first three cars would be closed, but the fourth would be open. He was told to throw the shoes into the open car, and then his passenger would tell him what to do.

In his entire life, Velasquez said he had never heard of a train going by that intersection at that time of night. Never. But the train came and he threw the sacks into the empty car. Then his passenger told him to take them to Pedernales and 5th Street. As they were driving over there, the woman told him that if the shoes came back, then

her husband would return home. If the shoes didn't come back, her husband would not return home.

She said there were 52 shoes in the sacks. He said he was laughing then, because he didn't think the shoes would come back. They arrived shortly before the train, and the shoes started coming out of the empty car "like a machine gun." He helped her gather them, and she counted 51 shoes. He told her that the other one had probably gone to Houston or someplace.

He found his flashlight and helped her search until they found the last shoe. She paid him \$50 and a \$10 tip, and he took her home to a house on New York Street. All the way, she was hollering that her husband was coming back. Velasquez doesn't know if he came back, as he never saw the lady again.

"I see so many things, so many things," Velasquez said. "You know I saw the things and I don't believe it. But I saw the things with my own eyes, and I don't know how you are going to be able to believe it. But it's true, you know."

And he has many stories of the same kind.

The original car that Roy Velasquez had to start his business was replaced many years ago. But the nostalgia of 50 years encouraged him to locate a replica and have it restored.

He paid \$2,000.00 for the dilapidated car when he found one, and has since invested about \$8,000 in restoring it, including a rebuilt engine. It is a 1928 Model A Ford tudor, and has three spare tires. The car he started out with cost him only \$450. The replica will be seen in Aqua Festival parades and other community events.

There have been a lot of miles on the meter for Roy Velasquez, and he has made his mark on Austin. His Depression-born business has prospered, but so have those who have known him through the years. The people and the community are richer for his having been here.

He sums up a lifetime this way:

"I'm still broke. I aint got no money, God Almighty, but I tell you man, I had a whole lot of competition. And I'm still hanging in there with my five dollars. Yeah."

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