



Milestones Behind the Icon

La Familia Cortez: A Timeline of Family, Flavor and Culture

75 Years of Familia, Comida y Cultura

La Familia Cortez Restaurants began in 1941 when family patriarch Pedro Cortez purchased a three-table café in the heart of El Mercado, San Antonio's Historic Market Square. Three quarters of a century later, that small start is now a beloved San Antonio icon and the heart of a family-owned company led by Pedro's children and grandchildren. Guided by Pedro's vision and commitment to the community, La Familia Cortez Restaurants is dedicated to providing the highest quality food, authentic culture and sincere hospitality daily.

1918 Valentin Larios escapes death in Mexico and goes into hiding from the revolutionists. The Cortez family offers to help him get to the United States by allowing him to marry their oldest daughter, Justina Cortez. Together they flee from the Mexican Revolution.

Once Valentin and Justina are settled in San Antonio, they open several small businesses. They eventually buy a grocery store called Villa del Carmen on Frio Street.

Pedro Cruz is born in Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco, Mexico.

1921 Cruz Llanes is born in San Antonio's Casa Navarro.

1930s During the Depression, Pedro Cortez, a young visionary from Mexico with an entrepreneurial spirit, moves to San Antonio to live with his Uncle Valentin and Aunt Justina. They give him a job in the butcher shop of their grocery store, Villa del Carmen. His favorite stop on his meat delivery route is El Mercado, San Antonio's Market Square, because of its resemblance to the San Juan de Dios Market in the heart of his hometown, Guadalajara. Produce Row, which runs through Market Square, includes a newsstand with newspapers and magazines from Mexico City, South America and Los Angeles that he reads to keep up with events occurring back home.

Pedro meets the love of his life, Cruz Llanes, a San Antonio girl born at Casa Navarro, who lives just two blocks from Market Square. They get married and begin their journey together to fulfill their American Dream.

1941 While out on one of his deliveries in Market Square, the owner of Jamaica No. 5, a small three-table café, offers to sell the café to Pedro for \$150. Pedro and Cruz purchase the quaint restaurant with a seating capacity of 12-15 people.

Pedro and Cruz welcome their first born, Manuel.



- 1943** Pedro and Cruz's second child, Jorge, is born.
- 1945** Cruz and Pedro's third child, David, is born.
- 1947** Until now, Pedro is working part-time at Jamaica No. 5 and full-time at the grocery store. With three children at home, he decides to dedicate all of his time to the restaurant. In the midst of a post-WWII recession, many people think he is crazy for the time and money he invests in the place, but Pedro wants to provide the best service to his customers. He installs an air conditioning system in the café and advertises it on all the windows. Before long, lines to get into Jamaica No. 5 form daily.
- 1951** Pedro purchases the Toyo Café in El Mercado and renames the restaurant Mi Tierra Café. From day one, he keeps Mi Tierra open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to cater to the various schedules of his customers.
- The El Mercado produce brokers acquire land on the west side of town and open a terminal market, causing many people to gradually move out of El Mercado. Many believe Pedro's business is sure to fail because without the produce market, the west side of San Antonio and Market Square is falling into disrepair. Pedro's strong ties to the area keep him rooted, and he continues his commitment to the restaurants.
- During a visit to Mexico City, Pedro's cousin, Maruca, tells him she wants to come to the United States to learn English. Pedro and Cruz open their home to her, and she comes to live with them. During her time in San Antonio, she suggests Pedro open a bakery adjacent to Mi Tierra because she did not like having to go to other bakeries in nearby neighborhoods for her sweet breads. Pedro tells her, "Yes, Maruca. We will make a Panadería, be patient."
- 1954** Cruz and Pedro's fourth child and only daughter, Rosalinda, is born.
- 1955** Pedro buys the property next to Mi Tierra and doubles the size of the restaurant. He is now able to add a panadería to Mi Tierra, featuring baked goods and Mexican Candy made entirely from scratch.
- "Panadería" is added to the restaurant's name, creating Mi Tierra Café y Panadería.
- 1960** Cruz and Pedro's fifth child, Ruben, is born.
- 1961** Borrowing money from Aunt Justina and withdrawing money from their savings, Pedro and Cruz buy the entire block at El Mercado and pour their hearts into renovating and growing Mi Tierra Café y Panadería.
- 1962** As a local business owner, Pedro joins the executive committee overseeing the organization of San Antonio's HemisFair '68.
- 1965** The Federal Urban Renewal Agency comes sweeping through the west end of downtown, obliterating whole neighborhoods and eliminating the Farmers Market building, Hay Market and the Washington Square stalls. No one is more upset or



determined to do something about the situation than Pedro. He has a great vision for what Market Square and the surrounding area can become, and he is not going to let anyone destroy the place he and his family hold so dear to their hearts.

1966 Pedro becomes a strong activist for the community as he works to save Market Square. He and his business neighbors speak to everyone who would listen, including the San Antonio City Council, multiple mayors of San Antonio, other governmental entities, the San Antonio Conservation Society, the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce and more. He shows slides of the San Juan de Dios market in Guadalajara at every opportunity he has to demonstrate his vision of what Market Square has the potential to become.

1968 Choosing to focus his time on Mi Tierra, Pedro closes Jamaica No. 5. He works hard on reviving and repositioning the restaurant to maximize its full potential.

Jose Luis Villagomez, Pedro's bookkeeper and long-time friend, has a knack for decorating and loves to decorate the restaurant for Christmas. Since the family is caught up in preparations for HemisFair, they completely forget to take down the Christmas decorations. As Jorge observes everyone coming in to dine at Mi Tierra for a taste of authentic Mexican and Tex-Mex cuisine, he takes notice of the joyous expression on their faces when they walk into a Mexican restaurant that feels like Christmas in July. Since that summer, Mi Tierra has kept the twinkling lights glowing in the spirit of Christmas year-round.

1971 Market Square undergoes a major multi-million dollar renovation. The project includes renovation of the Market House, expansion of the Farmers Market building with a rooftop parking deck, additional space for community festivities and celebrations, live entertainment and enhanced landscaping with stone pavers, cast-iron ornamental street lights and benches imported from Mexico.

1972 A city ordinance states that Market Square includes El Mercado and the Farmers Market, along with open plaza spaces leased on a daily or monthly basis to working artists.

1979 Pedro and Cruz decide to open a second restaurant, La Carreta Mexican Steakhouse, across the highway from Market Square.

1980 Pedro is recognized by the National Economic Development Association for the instrumental role he played in the revitalization of Market Square.

1981 After traveling to various cities throughout Mexico in search of something different and memorable, Pedro's son Jorge decides to expand the family business and opens La Margarita Restaurant and Oyster Bar, offering "Sizzling Fajitas" and seafood.

Governor Bill Clements names Pedro to the Texas Board of Corrections for a six-year term extending to February 15, 1987.

1984 The family is deeply saddened by Pedro's untimely death at the age of 66. Mi Tierra closes its doors for half a day so its team members could attend Pedro's funeral.



The family feels lost without its leader, but soon refocuses on Pedro's vision. Cruz Cortez takes the ownership shares she has inherited and divides them evenly among her children Manuel, Jorge, David, Rosalinda and Ruben. The children decide to honor their father by continuing to operate the family businesses and finding ways to expand Pedro's influence beyond the walls of Mi Tierra. The family heavily discusses ways they can grow, empower and preserve Latino culture within the San Antonio community.

1989 Mi Tierra Café y Panadería's newest addition, the Mariachi Bar, opens in a space next to Mi Tierra that formerly housed a liquor store. This masterpiece was creatively envisioned by Jorge Cortez, and all local San Antonio artists were used in designing and constructing the bar.

1990 The Cortez family hires artist Jesus Garza to create an indoor floor to ceiling fresco, envisioned by Jorge Cortez, to honor Pedro and Cruz Cortez.

1991 La Carreta is remodeled by Jorge and rebranded to Restaurante Pico de Gallo.

Jorge and David are recognized for their efforts to preserve and enhance the city's historic and culinary culture during the San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's Business Success Luncheon.

1995 Mi Tierra proudly completes an extensive renovation to its kitchen without closing the restaurant for even an hour. The project included a new drainage system and roof, stainless steel hoods and a 33-ton air condition to keep the kitchen cool. For five months, the kitchen is moved to a back storage room and connected to the service line, which occupied a former 200-seat dining room, by a temporary city-approved closed corridor that wrapped around the outside of the restaurant in order to transport the food and maintain non-stop operation.

Jorge and other prominent San Antonio community leaders become the "Founding Fathers of Centro Alameda" and are able to move forward in their efforts to save and restore San Antonio's historic Alameda Theater. More than just a movie palace, the Alameda served as a symbol of Pan-American relationships. During its prime, it was the largest movie theater dedicated to Mexican cinema and performing arts in the United States. The interior of the building showcases the history of Texas and Mexico through magnificent murals.

Cruz and Pedro's first born, Manuel Cortez, passes away at the age of 54.

1997 Through Jorge's strong leadership and dedication, Centro Alameda becomes the first organization in the nation to sign an affiliation agreement with the Smithsonian Institution.

2000 La Familia Cortez decides to ask Jesus Garza if he can repaint the "The American Dream" mural and alongside Pedro and Cruz, include portraits of Latinos who have helped shape life in Mexico, America and San Antonio. Today, the 80-foot mural lines the back wall of the restaurant and features more than 100 portraits of Hispanic community leaders, longtime employees and members of the Cortez family.



- 2001** Centro Alameda announces a strategic partnership agreement with the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, the nation’s largest producer of arts education and a leading presenter of the arts in many disciplines including theater, opera, symphony, ballet and dance.
- 2002** Pedro Cortez is inducted into the San Antonio Business Hall of Fame alongside Sam Barshop, the founder of La Quinta Inns, and Peter Holt, the owner of the San Antonio Spurs.
- 2003** The Senate of the State of Texas recognizes Pedro and Cruz Cortez as exemplary citizens of their city and the state of Texas.
- 2004** Pedro and Cruz Cortez receive the Henry Guerra Lifetime Achievement Award from the San Antonio Association of Hispanic Journalists (SAAHJ). This award is normally given to individuals who are distinguished in the field of Journalism, but SAAHJ felt that Pedro and his family had met the other criteria to the fullest extent by serving as a “bridge of understanding” between all communities and implementing change for the betterment of the Hispanic community.
- 2005** Pedro is honored posthumously as the recipient of the National Conference for Community and Justice Humanitarian Award.
- La Familia Cortez partners with the RK Group and the Kowalski family to form Dos Cocinas, an institutional food service company to successfully become the inaugural food service provider to Toyota Motor Manufacturing’s new facility in San Antonio.
- 2007** The Ecumenical Center for Education Counseling Health honors La Familia Cortez with the San Antonio Ethics in Business Award for its endless efforts to maintain high integrity and application of ethical-decision making.
- Dos Cocinas partners with Sodexo and is awarded the food service contract at USAA, one of San Antonio’s largest employers. Dos Cocinas opens three Mi Tierra locations at USAA and is responsible for the corporation’s executive dining room, Grayson Street Bistro and all of its catering, including its fleet of corporate jets.
- 2009** La Familia Cortez is recognized and honored with the Mexican American Unity Council, Inc. Lifetime Achievement Award for fulfilling the criteria of maintaining a tenacious spirit, persistently defending self-evident truths and continuously promoting economic and social empowerment within the Latino community.
- 2011** La Familia Cortez is honored at the Ninth Annual American Sunrise Gala which raises money for families living on the west side of San Antonio.
- 2014** Supporting Pedro’s vision for the area and his belief in preserving San Antonio’s roots, La Familia Cortez Restaurants and the Cortez family continue efforts to promote and develop the west-end of downtown San Antonio. The City of San Antonio formally passes an ordinance that recognizes the Zona Cultural, 44 contiguous blocks on the west-end of downtown that showcase San Antonio’s rich history and unique cultural art



and landmarks for residents and visitors alike. The recognition follows years of effort and support from Centro San Antonio, the Cortez family and many other partners and Zona Cultural stakeholders.

2015 **March:** La Familia Cortez is honored at the 2015 Cesar E. Chavez Legacy and Educational Foundation Gala with the CECLEF Lifetime Achievement Award for continuously working to making a difference in the San Antonio community, preserving Latino culture and creating special memories for every family who visits their restaurants.

September: The Texas Commission of Arts designates the Zona Cultural as the state's newest metro cultural district, making it the second cultural arts district in San Antonio alongside the historic King William District.

October: La Familia Cortez Restaurants opens its latest concept, Viva Villa Taquería, under the project management of Cariño Cortez, Pedro's granddaughter, who also serves as the opening chef for the new concept.

2016 The Westside Development Corporation awards La Familia Cortez with the Exitos en Nuestro Barrio Business Award for endlessly serving San Antonio's Westside community.

La Familia Cortez marks its 75th year of providing the highest quality food, authentic culture and sincere hospitality to every guest who visits a La Familia Cortez restaurant.

About La Familia Cortez Restaurants

Established in 1941, La Familia Cortez Restaurants proudly provides the highest quality food, authentic culture, sincere hospitality and dedicated community patronage through four restaurants in San Antonio's Historic Market Square area. Mi Tierra Café y Panadería and its adjacent Mariachi Bar, La Margarita Restaurant & Oyster Bar, Restaurante Pico de Gallo and Viva Villa Taquería include more than 600 team members working alongside the second, third and fourth generations of the Cortez family to preserve and grow the traditions, flavors and culture that make San Antonio such a unique and vibrant city. For more information, visit www.lafamiliacortez.com.

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