
News Release

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Rialto honors the memory of former Mayor Grace Vargas

Rialto, Calif. – Rialto City leaders are mourning the passing of former Mayor Grace Vargas, whose nearly 35 years of service to the community left a lasting legacy that will be felt for decades to come.

Vargas, who passed away on Sunday after a long illness, served as Mayor from 2000-2012 and was the first woman and first Latina to hold that position. Her many contributions to the City were memorialized in 2016 with the naming of the Grace Vargas Senior Center, located at 1411 South Riverside Ave.

Flags are being flown at half staff at City Hall and other locations.

“Grace Vargas was a trailblazer and an inspiration to women and women of color throughout our region. We will miss her passion, her strength and her commitment to our City,” said Mayor Deborah Robertson, who served on the City Council during Vargas’ tenure as Mayor.

Said Mayor Pro Tem Ed Scott, “Grace had a heart of gold and was determined to help make Rialto a great City. She embodied the best of what public service is.”

Vargas began working for Rialto in the late 1970’s in the City Clerk’s office. She would later become a clerk in the Rialto Police Department and the City Treasurer’s office, and in 1979 became the city’s licensing inspector.

Vargas was elected to the City Council in 1998, and was elected Mayor in 2000, 2004 and 2008.

Born in Yuma, AZ, Vargas moved to California in 1959 as a 22-year-old single mother of seven children. While living with her sister in Fontana, she joined the California Employment Training Act (CETA) program, which became a major turning point in her life as she acquired the skills to take on new responsibilities within the City.

During a 2012 cable TV interview, Vargas identified freeway expansion, economic development projects such as Renaissance Rialto and the senior center as major accomplishments during her tenure. Looking ahead, post-retirement, she said her intentions were to be “an ambassador to the city, to bring in new businesses and continue to help the people.”

City Clerk Barbara McGee, who has served in that position for 28 years, described Vargas as someone whose positive impact will be felt by generations of Rialto residents and businesses.

“She earned the name ‘Amazing Grace’ for a reason. I was proud to work along side her, and to call her my friend,” McGee said.

“Our ‘Amazing’ Grace, as we frequently referred to her, was a good mentor and a role model for all of us. We already miss her,” said Councilmember Rafael Trujillo.

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