

2004 CORNERSTONE FUND HONOREES

Esther Don Tang

The petite Esther Don Tang needed a two-step platform on which to stand when she introduced then-President Bill Clinton during his 1999 visit to Tucson. But on most every other occasion, the business leader, community activist and Catholic volunteer stands head and shoulders above the crowd.

Esther, co-honoree of the 2004 Catholic Foundation Cornerstone Gala, was selected for the distinction based on her unwavering commitment to the community. A second-generation Tucsonan, Esther married here, raised four children and has gone on to enjoy six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.



When she wasn't caring for her family, Esther worked alongside husband, David, who died in 2002, at their family-owned grocery store and other businesses. That experience, as well as growing up in a neighborhood mixed with Anglo, Chinese and Hispanic children, gave Esther a true sense of Tucson's diverse community and its needs.

She earned a degree in nutrition, with a minor in sociology, from the University of Arizona in 1942. It wasn't long before she began reaching

out to her community, serving on the boards of the YMCA and YWCA, the Community Chest and to the Chinese-American community.

In Catholic circles, she is perhaps best known as the long-time executive director of the Pio Decimo Neighborhood Center, a vital community resource founded by the Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic that almost 60 years later still serves the children and families of South Tucson. As part of her directorship, Pio Decimo offered kindergarten and Head Start classes, adult literacy, sewing and cooking courses, and an after-school remedial reading program.

She speaks English, Cantonese and Spanish, attributes that have served her well given her extensive involvement in local, regional, state and national boards and committees. Her community commitments, awards and honors are so numerous they span five type-written pages.

Some highlights? In 2002 the University of Arizona College of Humanities name the courtyard, first-floor conference room and two galleries in her honor at the Learning Services Building. And in 2003 Esther was named a "HistoryMaker of Arizona" by the Arizona Historical Society in Phoenix.

Today, Esther remains the owner of a midtown Tucson market. She's also a former major stockholder in a development company building retirement communities around Arizona.

Building community. It's something, it seems, that Esther Don Tang will never give up.