



## From the Desk of . . .

### THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The traditions we create now will be the memories our children cherish in the future.

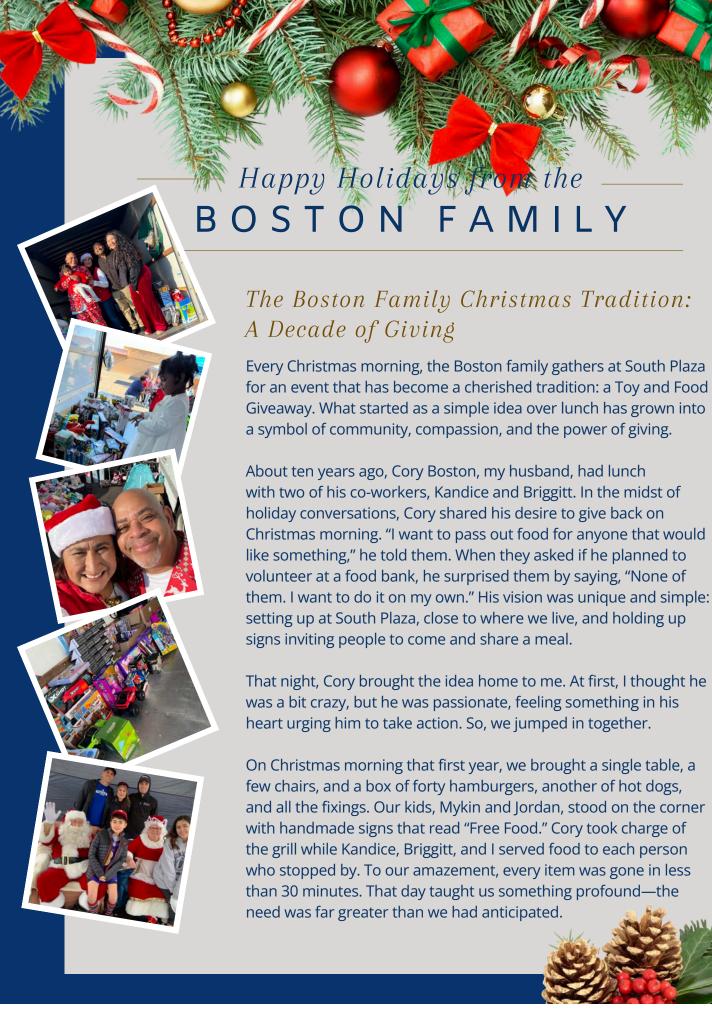
-anonymous

Welcome to the AZALAS November newsletter which is recognizing family, holiday traditions. Families or societal groups can view traditions as customs or beliefs. Traditions have a special significance from the past. They are shared from generation to generation; recognized during holiday seasons and other significant times during the year.

Traditions may be changed to fit the needs of the individuals involved. Traditions provide a sense of unity with the people we love and help pass down cultural values. For example, I remember a colleague of mine from Colorado exchanging the same birthday card with a relative year after year. Each year they add a greeting, the year, place in a larger envelope and mail it. They started this simple tradition after both agreeing it was a great birthday card. Each looks forward to receiving it. Christmas traditions can be watching a specific holiday movie as a family; shopping for or cutting down the right Christmas tree; making tamales or baking cookies as a family; or adopting families who struggle financially during the holiday season.

Thank you to those who accepted the invitation to share a family tradition with photos if available. We hope you enjoy reading about a variety of traditions and share yours with those closest to you.

Dr. Marvene Copato





The next year, we brought extra hot dogs and hamburgers and added a table piled with clothes from our closets, free for the taking. We quickly learned that when you offer something to the community, it will go—and fast.

By our third annual Christmas morning, the event had started to take on a life of its own. Friends and family were asking how they could help. We decided to bring even more, including a Santa suit for Cory, and added Mrs. Claus so that kids could talk to Santa on Christmas morning. We also introduced toys for the first time, knowing that for some of these children, this might be the only gift they'd receive. The joy and gratitude in their faces were unforgettable.

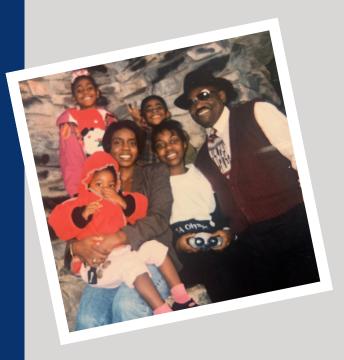
Fast forward to Christmas 2023—our biggest event yet. Cory and I rented a U-Haul, packed it with toys for over 300 kids, and expanded our menu to serve over 500 people: 250 hamburgers, 300 hot dogs, cases of water, and 15 boxes of chips. This time, Santa, Mrs. Claus, and even the Grinch came out to make the day magical.

To receive a toy at our Christmas morning giveaway, there's only one simple rule: the child must be there in person. This way, we know each toy is going straight into the hands of a child who will love and appreciate it. As for the food, it's open to all. Anyone who wants a warm meal, whether hungry, curious, or just out for a Christmas morning walk, is welcome.

Over the years, people have often asked us if this is a church event or something organized by a business. Each time, we smile and say that it's neither. This is something we do from the heart, as a way to give back to anyone who crosses our path. Our Christmas morning tradition isn't reserved for any particular group; it's open to anyone—young or old, down on their luck or simply drawn in by the spirit of community. To us, that's what the Boston Family Christmas Tradition is all about: sharing kindness with whoever needs it, year after year.

Christina Boston
Director of Multilingual Multicultural Education
Tolleson Union High School District #214





#### New Orleans Christmas

Growing up in the military, and living away from the roots of my family in Louisiana, I have always cherished the times we headed to New Orleans for family holidays as a child. I clearly remember the music of Donny Hathaway singing *This Christmas* while driving in the car with family and relatives I didn't often see, but always knew New Orleans was home. Traveling to my roots of Louisiana for the holidays created lasting memories, a sense of belonging, and enjoying holiday traditions that extend beyond state lines and continue today.

One special family holiday tradition is a Christmas soul food dinner—cooking together, spicing up cajun recipes and filling the kitchen with the aroma of New Orleans. Louisiana Creole-Soul food recipes passed down through generations. Two favorites are gumbo and pecan candy! We remember our loved ones who have passed by including their favorites on the dinner table and starting our meals with a thankful prayer.

Zel Fowler, M.Ed. Gifted Lead Teacher, Balsz School District #31 President/Director, Arizona Alliance of Black School Educators





#### A Christmas Tradition: The Jáuregui Family

Every Christmas Eve, as the stars twinkle brightly in the cold December sky, the Jáuregui family gathers in their cozy home, filled with the warm scent of homemade red pozole simmering on the stove. The table is set with love, and the laughter of children and the clinking of glasses echo through the rooms. It's noche buena, the night they've cherished for years, a night that feels like a quiet promise kept between hearts.

The tradition, simple as it may seem to others, holds deep meaning for the Jáuregui family. It has been this way for 18 years now, ever since their parents passed away, leaving behind not just memories, but a gift of togetherness that would last through the ages. Every year, they honor their memory by coming together, not just for the meal, but for each other. There is something sacred in this tradition — a thread that binds them, no matter the passing of time.

After they've eaten and shared stories, they gather around the Christmas tree, its soft lights shimmering against the darkness of the night. The air is filled with the joy of family games — laughter bubbling over as everyone plays, no one worried about winning, just relishing in the presence of those they love. The photo ornaments on the tree tell the stories of the past, and they snap pictures in front of the tree, capturing moments that will become part of their story, part of their legacy. A moment of joy to hold onto, to look back on, year after year.





But the most special moment of the evening is reserved for midnight — the quiet, reverent moment when the clock strikes twelve. In the stillness, the family gathers around their nacimiento, the nativity scene they have carefully set up in the corner of the room. For the entire month of December, the little figures stand in place — the humble manger, the angel above, the shepherds, the wise men, and the animals — all awaiting the arrival of the Christ child.

And then, just as the clock chimes, they place the porcelain figure of the baby Jesus into the manger. It is a moment of deep significance for the Jáuregui family, a reminder of the true meaning of Christmas. Each year, this act connects them not only to their parents, but to the deeper story of love, faith, and hope that Christmas represents. It's a tradition passed down, and as they kneel together, silently honoring the birth of the Savior, they feel their parents' presence in the room with them, smiling down from heaven.

This is the Christmas the Jáuregui family celebrates — one built on love, on faith, on family, and on the timeless traditions that keep the spirit of their parents alive in their hearts. A Christmas of simple joys, of remembering what truly matters, and of holding each other close as they honor the birth of Christ — the reason for the season.

Norma Jáuregui Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services Glendale Elementary School District #40











# Celebrating Diwali: A Tradition of Hope and New Beginnings

One holiday tradition I hold close to is Diwali, the Festival of Lights, which I celebrate with family and friends. Diwali, a major festival in India, symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance. As an educator, this is especially meaningful, as knowledge is the light that guides us out of ignorance toward new possibilities and hope.

Diwali marks the end of the year, and the next day is celebrated as the New Year, according to the lunar calendar. It's a time to reflect on the past and welcome new beginnings. We celebrate by illuminating our homes with vibrant lights, offering prayers for health, happiness, and prosperity, and enjoying the joyous crackle of fireworks. One of the most memorable moments is gathering with friends for a festive dinner, bringing warmth, gratitude, and renewal.

Diwali offers us a hopeful reminder that no matter the challenges, light and new beginnings always lie ahead.

Jigar Mehta, Principal
Pierson High School and NUSD Online School
Nogales Unified School District 1

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During the Thanksgiving holiday my family and I gather for a traditional dinner, spirits, lots of desserts and plenty of family time. Our Thanksgiving menu is traditional with turkey and ham being the main course, cornbread stuffing, macaroni and cheese, a medley of vegetables, ambrosia salad, candied yams and an assortment of desserts. Prior to dinner, we gather around the room and we share, "What we are thankful for." This has become a tradition for children, young people and adults in our family. Understandably for some it's also a moment of sadness if they've experienced loss within the past year, however, they still find it in their heart to share what they are thankful for. Some say they are thankful for a new job, a new grandchild, retirement, a new house, a marriage, a degree, or good health. Everyone has something to say. When it's done, we clap, we cheer up, give some hugs, and we head straight for dinner. We serve our parents first and all other family members follow. I do my best to reach out to friends who are alone during the Thanksgiving holiday. I will extend an invite and if they can't make it, I will find time to drive a plate to their home. There is a new family tradition that has evolved during our holiday gatherings (previously it was the Easter race).

This year it's called the Thanksgiving race! Just imagine an entire family headed to the races at a green belt across the street from one of our family homes. Prior to the holidays, there is a lot of NOISE and friendly banter in a family group chat regarding the upcoming race. The chatter involves who will beat out who and a comparison of winners and losers from the previous holiday! It doesn't matter who you are- your size, your age, your abilities...everyone is fair game! Now let me be clear, I do not race with the rest of the family. I've long predicted that I would mostly likely come in last with my sister or worse yet, fall! As the races begin, people are dashing for the finish line. Some only make it just a few yards and they are down for the count! During our last holiday gathering, a family dog (Ginger) raced too and she accidentally took down a family guest who was part of the chisme (sp). As I previously stated, everyone is fair game! Some make it to the finish line and some don't. It's all fun. Stay tuned there may be a Christmas race!

This leaves our family with plenty of stories to talk about for the rest of the year. Memories made and yes, some photos taken of winners and losers. These are moments that I cherish and I'm thankful every year that I have this wonderful opportunity to spend time with family and friends. May your holidays be blessed with joy, happiness, and good cheer.

Vincent Medina Photographer AZALAS







#### Making Memories & More

Our family has cherished the tradition of making tamales together— and it holds a special place in our hearts, representing not just delicious food, but a deeply rooted family and cultural bond in our Mexican heritage. With our beloved mother growing older, it feels more important than ever to keep this tradition alive. By passing it down to the next generation, we're preserving a piece of our history and strengthening the ties that connect our family. In these shared moments of preparing and cooking tamales, we build memories and ensure these traditions endure for years to come.

Sylvia Miller
Director of Early Childhood & Early Literacy
Roosevelt School District #66





Mashed potatoes are my favorite holiday tradition because they symbolize warmth, comfort, and the essence of family. Each year, during gatherings with loved ones, the preparation and enjoyment of this dish creates cherished memories. The simple act of peeling and mashing potatoes connects generations, as we share stories and laughter in the kitchen, and reinforce bonds that tie us together.

The buttery tastes and texture of mashed potatoes evokes immediate feelings of familia... biological and non... for me. In many ways mashed potatoes are like our hermanos, hermanas, tios, tias, amigos y amigas

that are mashed or blended together with our various quirks and personalities. They are the butter, cream, salt and pepper and even savory items like bacon in our potatoes and in our lives.

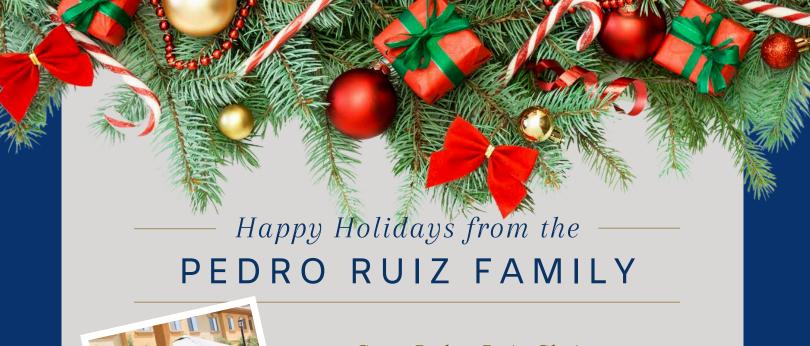
When life gets hectic, especially around the holidays, mashed potatoes serve as a reminder to me of what truly matters: connection. Each delicious spoonful embodies not only comfort food for the body but a connectedness to our loved ones which is food for our souls.

Mashed potatoes reinforce the notion that it is not just the food that makes the holiday special, but the people that are brought together in our lives that we share it with.

Happy holidays all!

Uly Navarrete Executive Director ALAS







#### Casa Pedro Ruiz Christmas Celebration

On March 20, 2013, the Cesar Chavez Foundation named a senior housing center after my late grandfather, Pedro Ferrel Ruiz. Pedro spent his greater adult life fighting for the rights of farm workers, organizing strikes and marches with the United Farm Workers, and alongside Cesar Chavez. Pedro lived to be 101 years old. Every year since 2013, the Familia Ruiz provides a holiday party to all of the residents of Casa Pedro Ruiz. The annual event includes serving a meal, dessert, and providing gifts to each resident. The residents are also treated to an evening of entertainment, from mariachi, folklorico dancers and music by my uncle Teodoro Ruiz and band. Our family volunteers before and during the event to ensure that the residents have a joyful holiday celebration.







## Holiday Traditions: Thanksgiving Dinner at Rebeca's

One of our family traditions is to meet up once a year for Thanksgiving dinner at my mother Rebeca's house. In essence, it's our yearly family reunion. Thanksgiving at the Perez household is the one time of year that it's a guarantee that all family members are going to see each other. All my siblings, tios and tias, cousins, friends and their significant others unite! The hook to get everyone in is Rebeca's pozole. The whole family waits in anticipation for the rich, spicy porky soup that everyone salivates and looks forward to. In addition, in military fashion, my mother directs her sister-in-laws to bring the supplemental American stuff.

My mother referees my tias a week before Thanksgiving as they all argue and bicker as to who will bring what. "Tu aces el Pavo, y tu los tamales, someone else the pies" my mother orders to her wild sister-in-laws via phone call or text. One thing is certain though, my mother is making the pozole, a jumbo cazuela that is spicy and a junior cazuela that is not so spicy for the punks who can't handle the heat. No family members ever dare make the Pozole, Rebeca's pozole is sacred.







#### Making Tamales with Abuelita Ramona: A Journey of Tradition, Leadership, and Love

Growing up, making tamales with my Abuelita Ramona was more than just a cherished family tradition—it was a masterclass in leadership and love, wrapped in the aroma of chile and masa. Each year, as Thanksgiving approached, the ritual would begin with my abuelita's meticulous care. She'd spend hours washing the hojas, her weathered hands moving gracefully, ensuring every leaf was clean and perfect. She prepared the chile mix with

the same devotion, blending dried chiles, garlic, and spices into a fiery-red paste that filled the kitchen with its rich, earthy aroma.

The chicken, steak, and rajas simmered on the stove while the voices of my siblings, cousins, and tíos and tías filled the room. At the time, I didn't fully understand why every step of the process took so long, but I came to realize that it wasn't just about making tamales—it was about honoring our culture, strengthening our bonds, and infusing every fold of masa with love and intention.



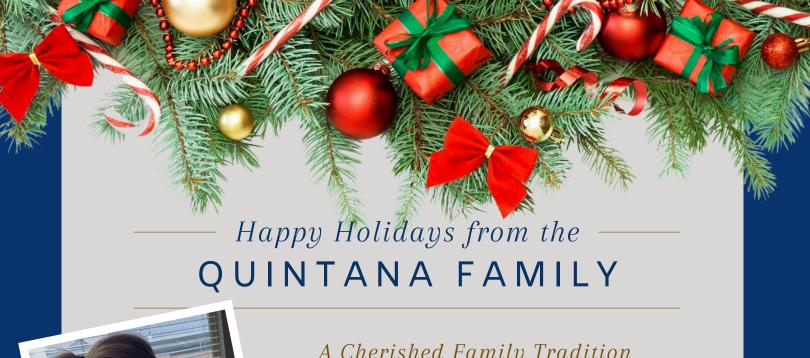


Those gatherings taught me lessons far beyond the kitchen. My abuelita's deliberate, patient approach modeled the essence of true leadership: building meaningful relationships, respecting everyone's contributions, and prioritizing quality over quantity. She ensured that everyone, from my youngest sibling to my oldest tía, felt valued and included. She'd pause to teach us the art of spreading masa, share a laugh over a family story, or acknowledge the effort someone put into the fillings. It was her way of leading—with love and care for both the process and the people.

Today, I carry those lessons into my own leadership roles, focusing on fostering authentic connections, honoring the individuality of my team members, and creating something meaningful together. Just like Abuelita Ramona's tamales, true success isn't measured by the number of tasks completed but by the heart and respect poured into every step—and every person—along the way.

Martin Perez
Associate Director for Support Services in Operations
Isaac School District #5







#### A Cherished Family Tradition

As far back as I can remember, making tamales for Christmas has been a cherished family tradition. It began with my mother and continues to this day. I am the youngest of nine children. The oldest, my brother Ray, just turned 83. After him came seven sisters, and then I was born in 1963. When my mother was still with us, most of my siblings, who lived near her in New Mexico, would gather every Sunday at "Grandma's house" for dinner. Holidays, especially Christmas, were celebrated together, and eating tamales on Christmas Eve remains a beloved family tradition.

On December 23rd, the family would come together at my mother's house to make tamales—a labor of love that resulted in 75 to 80 dozen tamales by the end of the day. The process was filled with lively conversations, good-natured arguments, and endless laughter. Adults and teenagers worked in shifts, spreading masa on the hojas, adding red chili pork filling, and folding the tamales before steaming them.



The most common disputes revolved around the "correct" amount of masa and chili needed to make the perfect tamale, with everyone offering their own opinion. These debates were a constant source of amusement as the massive tub of masa was slowly worked through.

To this day, we marvel at how so many of us managed to fit into her small house. The day wasn't just about making tamales—it was about storytelling, catching up on family news, sharing gossip, and teasing one another. The atmosphere was one of joy and togetherness. My mother, until her final years, always participated and supervised, ensuring everything was done just right. I can still vividly picture those days in her house, filled with the sounds of laughter and the delicious smell of tamales.

My mother used to tell us that she couldn't afford to give every family member a gift because our family was so large, so her gift to us was the abundance of tamales we all enjoyed. Even after her passing, we've carried on the tradition with our own families, following her recipe, her methods, and, most importantly, her spirit of love and giving.

Joe Quintana Training Facilitator AZALAS





Our Gutierrez family Ornament and Cookie exchange has been going for 30 years. My grown daughters were 1 and 2 years old when we started! Now they are participating and being crowned cookie and ornament queens! Yes, there is a an official judging that takes place and the winners are crowned Queens for the year. My mother comes from a family of 13 children, 11 being females. Between aunts, daughters, nieces, cousins and great nieces, their love of this tradition will be a special celebration that will continue for many years. Season of love, family and making memories.

Roxana D. Rico Superintendent Continental School District No. 39









#### A Christmas Jamboree

Christmas Eve is a special family holiday for la Familia Ruiz. Ever since I was a small child, it was always the holiday that our family gathered for and created special memories. Since becoming a father myself, I have carried on this tradition, hosting my family for an evening of games, Christmas outdoor movies by the fire and, of course, delicious Mexican food. The goal is always to keep everyone busy until midnight, when the gift opening happens. The event is one that is all about dressing in pajamas, recalling funny childhood stories and enjoying one another's

company. Throughout the night, we roast marshmallows, play lotería (with cash!), and most recently, hold a karaoke contest.

As the Ruiz children have grown up and we have fewer little ones in the family, we now bring one wrapped gift, which we exchange at the end of the night. This usually results in "steals", chuckles and a "who brought this?" chorus. The highlight of our night is always watching the little ones open their gifts at midnight. This is usually a time when "ohhs" and "ahhs", "let me see" and pictures are plenty. These special moments are ones that I cherish and, as I write this down, I'm filled with gratitude for the beautiful memories our family has made and look forward with anticipation for this year's special holiday.

Marco Ruiz
Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services
Cartwright School District





"May your walls know joy, may every room hold laughter, and every window open to great possibility."

-Mary Anne Radmacher

Make it a great day! Tracy Harris

