

A man with a Mission(s) *Sheldon Hall* By Conchita Lucero



Sheldon was one who never thought, *mission impossible*, because he was focused and was driven to make things possible. Once Prestene Dehrkoop stated he was like the Ever Ready Bunny he just keeps going and going. The Lord must have waited for him to lay down to sleep November 15th to call him home, I wonder if that was to catch him idle. The last time we talked he said he had passed the baton on to the younger generation but how does one try to fill the shoes this giant has left behind? I would like to meet the persons who will attempt this task.

I like to think that his good friend, famous artist don José Cisneros (2003 El Adelentado who passed away Nov 14, 2009), was at Heaven's Gate waiting to greet Sheldon saying *job well done*. Dn. José with tears in his eyes once told me "Sheldon Hall has done more for Hispanics and he has done it with his own money, he is the best friend Hispanics have!"

The New Mexican Hispanic Culture Preservation League honored Sheldon Hall as El Adelentado in 2005. In 2009 Sheldon was the recipient of El Paso's highest award the Conquistador Award acknowledging his lifetime accomplishments. He has served on the Texas Historical Commission and other historical societies and commissions. Sheldon as a member of Granaderos de Gálvez persuaded the Texas legislature to require the history of Bernardo de Gálvez in Texas school texts.

Sheldon was the founder of the Mission Trails Association in El Paso which restored missions and seeks to preserve and promote the Spanish History of the area. Hall has worked to make others aware of Don Juan de Oñate and the Spanish settlements that predate the Pilgrims. His efforts changed biased wording about don Juan de Oñate in the Texas Museum and helped to get textbooks in Texas to include the First Thanksgiving story. In an El Paso Times article his friend Elias Bonilla said "He would even travel to Plymouth Rock every November to educate people about the real first Thanksgiving." At one time Sheldon went to Plymouth Rock, Mass., in costume, and was "arrested" as a publicity stunt, after challenging them on who had the first Thanksgiving. He was known to dress up in helmet and breastplate for the role of the Don Juan de Oñate, the Spanish explorer who led an expedition of soldiers, settlers and priests. He, like don José, appreciated the difficult route across the deserts of Mexico north to the location of today's Santa Fe that these explorers traveled.

King Juan Carlos I of Spain honored Sheldon for his efforts to highlight the Spanish history of the area. Hall was granted three audiences. In 1986 he was awarded by the King of Spain the medal, La Cruz de Caballero de la Orden de Isabel la Católica, for his efforts with the Texas Missions and promoting Spanish history. In 1984 he was appointed Honorary Consul of Spain to act on behalf of El Paso and Southern New Mexico. He was appointed to serve on the El Paso "Quadracentennial Commission in 1995 by Governor George W. Bush.

*What a loss for our city and nation. He gave so much his life to shine a light on the HUGE contributions of the Spanish colonists to our American Southwest history and our nation's*

*history (so often ignored!). With my love, Jody Schwartz 2009 dona Eufemia and chair of fund raiser for the don Juan de Oñate monumental sculpture*

Sheldon researched and promoted the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary which grew into a re-enactment at the Chamizal National Memorial Park. Mr. Hall contacted the Associated Press in an effort to bring attention to the El Paso event and the word spread. According to Hall a couple of reporters from the Wall Street Journal came down for the story on the First Thanksgiving which was later printed on the front page. He worked with others creating children's books and a video on the re-enactment available for the schools. He felt these efforts would create interest in the lost history of El Paso and the Spanish presence and he was a supporter of the don Juan de Oñate equestrian statue.



*Photo of Sheldon Hall and José Cisneros*

John Sherrill Houser, sculptor and 2009 Adelentado wrote "I first met Sheldon Hall sometime in 1986 when the XII Travelers Association was just getting underway in El Paso. We had coffee together in a little Mexican restaurant and I remember his rapt attention as I explained the concept of a sculpture walk through 400 years of history at El Paso el Norte. Of course with his keen interest and knowledge of early Spanish exploration and settlement he immediately saw the opportunities and benefits of dramatizing El Paso's long and fascinating history both for educational purposes and as a way of establishing El Paso's historical identity -- nationally.

Such ideas were not new to Sheldon. He was already a pioneer in dramatizing El Paso's history on a national scale. His involvement with the XII Travelers was another page in his resumé but his contributions were numerous and his support was steadfast.



Such individuals are rare and irreplaceable, but gratefully, their accomplishments remain a memorial gift to future generations."

Thanks to people like Sheldon and Jody Schwartz who worked to make possible the efforts of John Sherrill Houser, and son Ethan were able to complete the famous art sculpture of the Don Juan de Oñate Equestrian at the El Paso Airport.

Once when visiting Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin Sheldon was disturbed when reading inaccurate information about don Juan de Onate and proceeded to meet with the curator. The meeting resulted in a member of the Texas Historical Society writing an accurate account which replaced the erroneous display.

Sheldon reached out to various historians such as Joseph Sanchez who said òI sent him some materials on Juan de Onate's first thanksgiving--plus the one up at San Juan in fall of 1598--which would have been the first Hispanic Thanksgiving after a harvest in the interior of the United States.

Dr. Felix Almaráz stated òI first met him at a social event in San Antonio, hosted by the first Consul General of Spain in Houston, Eric Martel. Sheldon was in his prime and worked from a well-spring of enormous energy. He truly believed in the story of Spain in America. Being Honorary Consul of Spain in El Paso gave to Sheldon a base from which to reach out to main cities in Texas and then north to New Mexico. He easily collaborated with several Consuls-General of whom I especially remember Antonio Soler, Leopoldo Stampa, Julio Montesino (the best, in my opinion), Miguel Angel Fernandez Mazarrambroz, and now Cristobal Valdez. In El Paso County, Sheldon was a perennial pillar at the annual conference sponsored by the San Elizario Historical and Genealogical Society conference, including three years ago when he showed up wearing a conquistador's costume. This year, when I was invited to speak in April, I was saddened by the news that, due to ill health, Sheldon Hall was not present. With José Cisneros, the artist, Sheldon was a constant supporter and accompanied him to events locally and out-of-town -- if their health stamina allowed. Honorary Consuls today in New Mexico, and in Texas, too, fall short of the mark in comparison to Sheldon Hall who thrived in the assignment. Paz y bien, don Felix.



Sheldon and Jane Hall have donated generously to the New Mexican Hispanic Culture Preservation Leagues silent auctions and supported past banquets he will be missed and the league expressed our condolences to his lovely wife and family.

Sheldon and Jane Hall at fund raiser for don Juan de Oñate hosted by the Lyons in Santa Fe