

Dames of the Round Table

Texas-Born Women's Philanthropy Organization Celebrates 100th Anniversary

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How many century-old women's groups in Texas can you name? How about 100-year-old groups dedicated to fostering continental relations?

The Pan American Round Table is both, and this year the organization is celebrating in San Antonio, where it was founded in 1916 to promote cultural alliances among countries in North and South America.

"I'm not aware of any other groups like ours that have been around for 100 years," says Brownsville's Isabel Vezzetti, state director of the Pan American Round Table. "This is a very special organization, and our centennial is a wonderful way to celebrate our achievements."

Vezzetti recently convened a group of South Texas "Round Table" members at her home in Brownsville for two of its favorite reasons: to hold an educational discussion and enjoy a delectable meal. Over several hours, they talked about Round Table's origins and memorable meetings throughout the hemisphere. A consistent thread connecting each discussion was Pan American Round Table founder Florence Terry Griswold.

"Mrs. Griswold was very important for women because we were not traditionally involved in decision-making policies," Vezzetti says. "With her, there was an understanding that where women go, men will follow."

Past Table 1 Director Maria Yzaguirre, also from Brownsville, adds that Griswold encouraged women to become more active in fostering

international relations by seeking opportunities to bridge gaps and strengthen ties across borders.

Adds Brownsville Round Table member Sandra Maxwell, "We honor her legacy by staying true to our original motto: All for one and one for all."



South Texas members of the Pan American Round Table met in Brownsville.

Corpus Christi's Peggy Lasater Clark, a past state director and past alliance director general, offers additional insight about the Round Table's early years, noting that Griswold's experiences growing up on the Mexican border near Eagle Pass in the late 1800s and early 1900s shaped her approach to organizing the group.

"She took the concept of the roundtable from King Arthur's knights, with the idea that everyone at the table was equal," Clark explains. "Each seat was designed to be represented by every country in the Americas."

Edinburg's Elsie Perez fondly recalls her experience traveling throughout the hemisphere, attending conferences, parades,

and events dedicated to encouraging communication and fellowship.

"It's a wonderful way to bring women together and build bonds that you couldn't have otherwise—we all learn from each other," she says. "Another highlight is getting to experience all the different styles of food in the different countries!"

According to member Ana Flores of Laredo, the organization's primary philanthropic project is student scholarships, noting that they can be customized for each community. The Texas Round Table group has awarded more than \$1 million to students over the past several decades.

Members are currently planning the Alliance Pan American Round Table Convention, which will draw up to 800 members from the Americas. There are more than 200 groups in the Western

Hemisphere, and 20 in Texas. The convention is part of October's San Antonio centennial festivities, which, to date, include a large commemorative gathering at the Menger Hotel's THC historical marker, a parade of flags from 35 countries during the opening ceremonies, and a visit to Griswold's gravesite at nearby Mission Burial Park.

"We're looking forward to having everyone in Texas for the centennial," says Brownsville's Norma Linda Castellano, a past local table director. "When I first joined, I enjoyed meeting with women for lunch who could work and talk together, but over time, I took on more responsibility and eventually became an officer. This is truly an empowering organization." ★