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Fox Tech's class of 1956 still rocking and rolling at 70th high school reunion

By **Vincent T. Davis**, Staff Writer

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Gift Article



Sylvia Tejada, president of the Fox Tech class of 1956's alumni association, listens to Mariachi Mi during her 70th class reunion.

Robin Jerstad/For the Express-News



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When Ana Maria Gutierrez stepped into Fox Tech's cafeteria, she was a vision from the days of sock hops, doo-wop groups and hot rods.

She wore white bobby socks, turquoise flats, a polka-dot headband, a pink scarf and a white sweater. The centerpiece of her outfit was a blue, knee-length poodle skirt with a sewn-on pink poodle — an outfit straight from her time as a student in the downtown school's class of 1956.

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“Most of All,” a 1955 R&B song by The Moonglows, flowed from speakers as Gutierrez, 88, arrived for her 70th high school reunion. Several family members accompanied her, but not her husband, David Gutierrez, the love of her life who died two years ago.

The couple met when she was 16 and attending what was then called San Antonio Vocational and Technical High School, but became known as Fox Tech. He was so smitten that he transferred from Burbank High School to be by her side. Three years later, the high school sweethearts married and started a family.

“He followed where I was at,” Gutierrez said of the man she was married to for 65 years. “I was happy to have met him.”

The 50s-styled fashionista was one of more than 80 alumni who attended the 70th reunion held recently at the historic school’s campus, which is now home to three San Antonio Independent School District schools: Fox Tech, CAST Tech and Advanced Learning Academy.

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'A true community'

The class of 1956's alumni association sponsored the event, calling it "Shake, Rattle and Roll (in our wheelchairs and walkers)." The association has met monthly since their 50th year reunion at the Fort Sam Houston Golf Club. Members have raised funds through activities such as yard sales and dances, with proceeds going to buy books and mariachi outfits for students at their alma mater.

Current school district officials said the alumni are part of a proud legacy.

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Stephanie Cash, principal of the Advanced Learning Academy, said it was an enthusiastic "yes" when asked to host the event.

"People know us as Fox Tech, which is part of the magnificent history it has," Cash said. "Today felt magical to see them back on their home campus. It's that same pride I see with our students."

SAISD Foundation board member Brenda Cervantes Sanchez said the foundation was excited to help the association bring the alumni back to their old stomping grounds.

“These folks are thriving,” she said. “They are a true community and what Fox Tech stands for across the decades.”

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The band Mariachi Mi serenaded the crowd and a disc jockey spun old tunes that had couples dancing cheek to cheek. Attendees crowded around nostalgic mementos, squinting to find their younger selves in yearbooks and a panoramic class photo.

When Gabriel Luna, 89, spotted himself in a picture, it conjured up memories of serving in ROTC, raising and lowering the American flag on school days.

“It was a very solemn ritual,” Luna said.

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Happy days

When they graduated in May 1956, “Heartbreak Hotel” by Elvis Presley and “Why Do Fools Fall in Love?” by Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers topped music charts.

Bus boycotts, a deadly tornado and nuclear tests made headlines across the nation. Despite the times, the students remember high school fondly, said Lupe Gonzales, secretary of the alumni association.

She recalled enjoying being on the Red Jackets Pep Squad and attending sock hops, or dance parties, in the school’s gym. She compared her own high school years to those shown on screen in the sitcom “Happy Days,” which ran on the ABC Network two decades later.

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She thanked her teachers for their strict rules that taught her to write 125 words a minute in shorthand, a skill that landed her a government job a month after graduation.

“The school was disciplinary in every way,” Gonzales, 88, said. “That helped us in future endeavors.”

High school engineering classes helped Homer Cadena get hired at Kelly Air Force Base as an apprentice, he said. He said the class’s bond was “rooted in a shared history, academic excellence, personal growth and life learning.”

The alumni were joined by some former students from other classes, who shared in reliving their teenage years, and by their family members who came to celebrate the milestone 70th anniversary.

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Gutierrez was accompanied by her daughter, Rita Ann Kalmar, who dressed as Sandy from the movie “Grease” for the occasion.

Kalmar said the group of her mother’s classmates who’ve continued to gather have grown closer over the years, though their numbers have dwindled.

“Events like this mean a lot when you regroup with people you may have seen in the hallways or know by name,” Kalmar said. “Now you know them more intimately because it’s a smaller group. What’s left is left, but they’re still having a good time.”

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**Vincent T. Davis****REPORTER/COLUMNIST**