



Celebrating the Life and Legacy of Pathfinder Legend Connie Perez



The Southeastern California Conference recently lost Connie Perez, a Pathfinder pioneer who organized and promoted Spanish Pathfinder Club Ministries for over 40 years. Perez was a lifelong Adventist who dedicated her boundless energy and exceptional artistic talent to youth ministries. She will be greatly missed by all whose lives were enriched by her influence.

“Connie Perez was an unstoppable force,” said Pastor Rudy Carrillo. “I began working with her in 1982 when she was the Orange County Pathfinder coordinator, and she was always someone you could depend on.”

Perez was introduced to Pathfinding in the early 1950s as a boarding student at Sandia View Academy in New Mexico. She found that the Pathfinder experience strengthened her faith and taught her important lessons in leadership and resilience. After she and her husband, David, had their three children, Roger, Ken, and Karen, she started the first Spanish Pathfinder club at the Shelton Street church in Santa Ana.

Her son Ken remembers her dedication to promoting Pathfinder clubs in surrounding churches. “She would dress in her Master Guide uniform and visit churches throughout Orange County and Riverside to help them organize and grow their Pathfinder clubs,” he said. “Her uniform had two sashes completely full of Pathfinder honors. If she didn’t know how to do something, she would teach herself so she could pass that information on to others.”



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Perez's dedication to Pathfinders influenced her family members. Her sisters, Eva Vasquez and Rose Martinez, went on to become directors of Pathfinder clubs, her son Roger is Pathfinder coordinator for North San Diego County, and several nieces have served in Pathfinder leadership roles.

Her niece, Martha Sanchez, joined Perez as assistant coordinator for the Orange County Pathfinder clubs in 2001. "As long as I knew her, Connie loved Pathfinding with all of her heart," said Sanchez. "When I was a Pathfinder in Santa Ana, she arranged for the drill and bugle corps to march in the city parade and made sure that we all had the right white gloves and socks. She taught glass painting or leathercraft honors. She was always on the go." When Perez retired in 2011, Sanchez became the Pathfinder coordinator for Orange County, but Perez held the title of honorary coordinator for the rest of her life as a tribute to her 25 years of service.

Throughout her life, Perez painted banners and murals for churches, the SECC office, and for camporees. Perez's sister, Eva Vasquez, said that Perez's artistry was always an asset to the Pathfinder clubs that she led. "On camping trips, Connie would tell the Pathfinders to collect stones, and then she would teach a rock painting class," said Vasquez. "She designed a logo for the Pathfinder coordinator jackets. She was always creative."

Her longtime friend Frances Raycups also remembers Perez's talent. "I have seen Connie create beautiful paintings on any surface—recycled plastic, a piece of wood, even a tortilla!"

"Connie insisted that I complete the Master Guide program and then she insisted that I become the director of a Pathfinder club," said Raycups. "Connie was a mentor to so many and was always raising the leadership bar." Raycups now serves as the SECC coordinator for Pathfinder Club Master Guides.

Though Connie experienced poor health in her final years, those who knew her are looking forward to seeing her at the resurrection, when her formidable strength will be restored to her. "The Lord has promised that we will see Connie again," said Raycups, "and I know that He keeps His promises."

By Tricia Murdoch Zmaj