

A Man Who Gave Voice to Voiceless

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This Editorial Board and its members, have, over the years, met with or talked to Andy Sarabia many times.

One theme developed: This was a man who consistently stepped out of self to serve others. This is generally called servant leadership, and Sarabia — one of the founders of Communities Organized for Public Service — was an ardent practitioner.

Sarabia, 79, died May 3. He was COPS' first president, making his mark by helping San Antonio's power structures realize the inequities that have burdened the city's poorer neighborhoods.

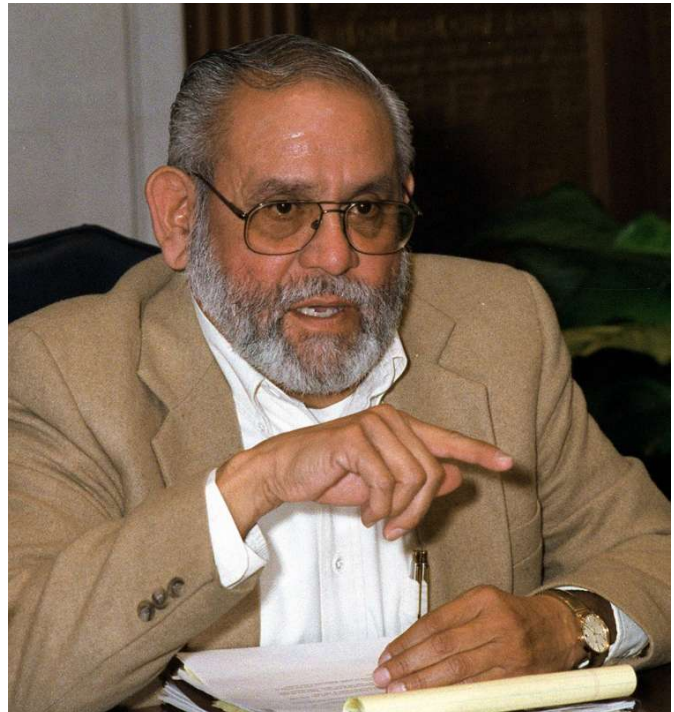
If this makes Sarabia sound like a ham-fisted table-pounder, think again. His effectiveness came by gently changing hearts and minds through sound reasoning — and organizing others to act similarly. Sarabia helped church parishioners and residents organize to get their fair share.

Why? He realized poor kids shouldn't be drowning for lack of adequate drainage during flooding. His organization, formed in 1974, prepared a counter-budget, an alternative to the City Council's own budget.

In 2016, on the occasion of the 42nd anniversary of COPS — now COPS/Metro — we asked Sarabia about COPS' accomplishments.

“Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) has been a vehicle which has taught regular, everyday people to learn how to converse, listen and organize themselves around common interests. Together, effectively changing the political culture of our beloved city from a Good Government League (GGL) controlled city to one of single member districts,” he wrote. “Imagine San Antonio's ZIP codes 78207 and 78258 working together, crafting an agenda for the future of San Antonio. Now, that would be powerful.”

He had no college education and he spent his career working at Kelly AFB. But he spent a lifetime trying to unify this city around the notion that, together, we can improve things. Today, the city has what it calls equity budgeting — communities receiving according to need. And that, we think, is a natural outgrowth of Sarabia's efforts.



Andy Sarabia speaks to the Express-News Editorial Board in 1997.