

ARIZONA DIARY

THIS WEEK IN ARIZONA HISTORY

In 1894, the town of Globe was destroyed by fire.

In 1922, **Rose Mofford**, who would become Arizona's first woman governor, was born in Globe.

In 1928, a forest fire consumed more than 1,000 acres of timber in the Ajo Mountains.

Sunday: History & People
Monday: Life Moments
Tuesday: Life Remembered
Wednesday: History & People
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Artist explores Mexico through card game

By Angela Cara Pancrazio
The Arizona Republic

Teresa Villegas misses the smell of her paints.

The Phoenix artist, who is the mother of a 1-year-old and who is five weeks from giving birth to twin sons, hasn't had a whiff for nearly two years.

"I love oils," said Villegas, 41. "I could eat them."

She's been able to remain close to her palette of vibrant purples, pinks, greens, blues and crimsons, through her traveling exhibit of 54 paintings that depict the culture and history of Mexico.

So though she can't pick up a brush, she can track her popular exhibit, "La Lotería: An Exploration of México," as it travels the nation. It has been booked by galleries and museums nationwide through 2008.

Villegas is the artist's married name. She grew up in Iowa, and it was there that she fell for Mexico.

Her grandfather, a theater professor at a private college in Davenport, Iowa, traveled to Mexico City as a playwright. He then would bring the culture back to the Midwest by writing plays and hiring actors from Mexico.

He taught her about Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo long before the Mexican artists were popularized by Hollywood movies.

She discovered *lotería*, or Mexican bingo, on her own.

More than 20 years ago, in her freshman year at the University of Arizona, she traveled to Mexico for the first time during spring break. She stumbled upon a fair in the tiny town of Nyarite.

Everyone was gathered around a circle of tables and chairs, hovering over *tablas*, or small boards that resembled bingo cards, only the squares were filled with pictures. The



Photos by Angela Cara Pancrazio/The Arizona Republic

Teresa Villegas, 41, has created an exhibit, "La Lotería: An Exploration of México," a series of 54 paintings corresponding to the number of cards in the Mexican game.

clutch of players surrounded a table piled high with toy prizes.

"The imagery captured me right away," Villegas said.

The game, widely popular in small Mexican towns, is similar to American bingo. Only in bingo, a number and letter are chosen from a birdcage-like drum and the game board has various numbers listed under the letters that spell out b-i-n-g-o.

In *lotería*, a colorful image is drawn from a deck of cards that matches those found on the board.

The game's images stuck with Villegas.

After college, several trips to Mexico and a brief career as a Tucson newspaper illustrator, Villegas decided to paint her own interpretation of Mexico,

its history and the people, and to tell the story through the *lotería*.

Villegas used the most popular version of the game, the Don Clemente Gallo, as her template. It is more than 100 years old.

She came up with new images and painted them on 54 wood panels, the same number of cards in a *lotería* deck.

Each painting is either an icon of daily life in Mexico or a historical figure. One image is *pan dulce* or sweet bread; another is a bowl of *pozole*, or soup; then there's a pack of *chicle*, those little packs of gum that children love to hawk on Mexico's street corners.

Villegas retreated from her rich, bright palette to depict a lesser known but important

player in the country's history, a nun named Juana Inés de la Cruz.

"I'd never heard of her, I kept seeing this nun on their money," Villegas said, always wondering, "Who is this, what is this about?"

She unraveled the incredible story of how Sor Juana, or "Sister Juana," came from Spain to Mexico in the mid-1600s and espoused pro-feminism beliefs such as the education of women. A radical notion, Villegas said, in a time when "you either got married or became a nun."

One of the few original *lotería* icons that Villegas kept was *el corazon*, or the heart.

"How could I not do a heart?" Villegas asked. "How could anybody not do a heart?"



One of the paintings features *los Churros*, a culinary delight of Mexico.



El Sireno depicts a merman, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the tail of a fish.

More information

For more information about Teresa Villegas, her traveling exhibit, the new version of the *lotería* game and a book published by the University of Arizona Press see her Web site at www.teresa-villegas.com.

ACTS OF KINDNESS

Thanks to jogger

I was putting Christmas presents into the back of my SUV, which was parked on Campbell Avenue by my back gate. I had put several bags of gifts into the car, then went back, locked up and came back to put one in the back of the car. I looked down and went to step off of the curb when something happened.

I went down on my right knee and fell over on my left side. I could not get up. I tried and tried. When I fell, my keys fell out to the end of the car where I couldn't reach them to honk my horn for help. My purse was in the car with my cellphone. Cars were going down the street with their lights on but did not stop. I tried a few more times to get up, looked up and saw a light-blue piece of sky open. I prayed for help. I looked back down the street and a runner was on the other side. He looked over, and I told him I'd fallen and couldn't get up. He came over and was so helpful. He said his name was Muhammad. Thanks, God, for sending someone who was caring and made sure I was able to walk. Thanks again, Muhammad, for your caring to help.

— Donna Bloom
Phoenix

Honest folks at SRP

While paying bills recently, I paid my SRP bill and mistakenly included the next check as well. It went unnoticed until I received the blank check back from SRP two days later. It was such a relief to know that there are honest people among honest companies, and in this age of rampant fraud and identity theft. I applaud and thank you, SRP!

—Kathy Straub
Chandler

Send your Acts of Kindness of about 200 words to actsofkindness@arizonarepublic.com or mail to Acts of Kindness, 200 E. Van Dyke St., Phoenix, AZ 85004