

The University of Texas Pan American

ENDOWMENT PROFILE



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The Peña Brothers: A spirited journey from the fields of America to corporate America

WHEN THE TIME CAME, Gilberto's father looked at his son and said: "I'll take you." The senior Mr. Peña knew that great opportunities existed for his children beyond the farm fields. So, he drove his son to a college campus he knew nothing about. And, thus, began an ambitious journey toward success and helping others pursue higher education in South Texas.

Gilberto Peña, the eldest son, and his younger brother Alfredo Peña, attribute their success in life to their father and grandmothers, who always supported their endeavors to "get ahead." As a migrant family, the Peñas worked in the fields every summer. Gilberto and Alfredo picked cotton in South Texas, peaches in California, or pickles in West Texas. As a result, the boys never quite experienced the freedoms of summer that many other children enjoy. Still, if playtime wasn't a priority, school was. Gilberto, Alfredo, and their five siblings always left home June 1 and returned August 25 because their father insisted that they finish and start school on time.

Gilberto's initial college experience at Texas A&I in Kingsville was cut short. After one semester, Gilberto was drafted into the U.S. Army. Two years later, Alfredo began attending The University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA). When Gilberto returned from the army, he used his GI Bill benefits to join his brother. Then, Alfredo took a break from school to follow in his brother's military footsteps. "At that time, you invested two years in the service and got four years of college benefits," said Alfredo. "It was a heck of a deal." Gilberto and Alfredo would eventually graduate from UT Pan American with accounting degrees from the College of Business Administration in 1977 and 1978, respectively.



Gilberto believed in seizing opportunities. So, after graduating, he left Texas and joined Deere and Company in Moline, Ill. "It is important for students to learn early on that there are opportunities out

there. But you have to be prepared to go out there and face the world," said Gilberto. Gilberto worked with the company for 32 years, ascending the corporate ladder and relocating to New York, Georgia and North Carolina where he resides today. In 2000, Gilberto earned an MBA from Duke University.

After graduating from UT Pan American, Alfredo worked for Tenneco Oil Company in Houston for one year. He then pursued a law degree at UT Austin. With his J.D. in hand, Alfredo went to work for Exxon Company, U.S.A. and then with Exxon-Mobil. For more than 30 years, Alfredo found outstanding opportunities in more than a dozen different assignments: from Houston to Corpus Christi to Midland; from Tokyo to Sakhalin Island, Russia to Lagos, Nigeria.

The Peña brothers are now giving back. Both brothers attribute their successful careers to the education they received at UT Pan American and have established the Dolores Galvan Canales y Nazaria Ochoa Peña Memorial Endowed Scholarship. Named after the grandmothers who helped raise them after their mother passed away, the scholarship supports students in the College of Business Administration. Direct donations, along with contributions received through corporate matching gift programs and gifts of stock have enhanced the endowment. "A lot of people have the desire [to give] but it doesn't make the 'to do' list. It's about instituting a sense of giving back and helping someone," said Alfredo Peña.

The Peña brothers are committed to spreading the spirit of giving and are encouraging their cousins and other supporters to contribute to the endowment. Together, they hope to help as many students as possible achieve their full potential, just as they were able to do.

UT Pan American's College of Business Administration (CoBA) currently maintains accreditation by AACSB International; fewer than five percent of business schools worldwide have earned this accreditation. The MBA program is also ranked as one of "The Best 301 Business Schools" by the Princeton Review. To find out more about the College of Business Administration and UT Pan American's various giving opportunities, please visit www.utpa.edu.

If you would like more information about how to start an endowment, please contact:

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