

Juan Hernandez Jr., was born to San Juana “Nina” and Juan Hernandez Sr., on September 17, 1949 in Mercedes, TX. He is one of six siblings. His family migrated to Houston, TX and settled in the neighborhood of El Dorado. Juan is a graduate from Furr High School, class of 1969. Later, he briefly attended San Jacinto Community College, and thereafter Juan joined the Houston Firefighter Academy, where he graduated and became part of the Houston Fire Department. Juan later would marry Anna Medina and they would settle in the neighborhood, Denver Harbor. Here they raised their four children, John, Henry, Carmen, and Sarah.

Juan served the public and community as a firefighter for 35 years. Throughout Juan’s service in the Houston Fire Department he, alongside the late State Senator Mario Gallegos and others, established and organized the Hispanic Firefighter Caucus Local 341. Juan flourished in the department pushing for equality and fairness, as well as displaying monumental leadership capabilities. He became familiar with political agenda, tactics, and oversight throughout his push for what was fair to and for the people. His tenacity and movement within the Fire Department and political realm led him to acquire lasting relationships and networks with local and state politicians. Ultimately, Juan envisioned people as simply that, people first, this is why he fought hard and fair. He was committed, consistent, and engaged in his profession. He earned his way vertically to a Junior Captain of the Heavy Rescue and Apparatus team. Juan retired from the Houston Fire Department as Junior Captain in 2005.

After his tenure within the Houston Fire Department. Juan and his wife, Anna Hernandez, bought and obtained ownership of Dona Maria Mexican Cafe in 2005, in the community of Second Ward. Dona Maria Mexican Cafe is a dignified “mom and pop shop”, “hole in the wall” restaurant offering authentic Mexican cuisine. It is here where Juan capitalized on his connections, networks, political relationships, and friendships. Juan and Anna have been able to utilize their small business as a platform to unite people from all backgrounds and journeys. Juan has organized and funded beautification projects for Denver Harbor. Juan has pushed for anything as small as new street lights to the revamping of out of date playground equipment in the lower income neighborhoods. He has organized community toy drives and projects, including but not limited to, partnering with local fire stations to help parade through Second Ward and Denver Harbor and giving back to those communities. He has rallied neighbors, politicians, and friends to assist with neighborhood clean ups. Restoring and beautifying the same neighborhood he resides in as well as surrounding ones. Juan has recently worked closely with Harris County Commissioner, Adrian Garcia, to obtain beautification funding and reconstruction of the now Selena Quintanilla Park (If you ask any native of Denver Harbor, it is still known as Denver Harbor Park).

Not only does Juan navigate and organize such projects that give back to the community, but more importantly he participates. He was, and is, never one to just sit back and watch. Juan has used the restaurant business platform to allow voices of the people to be heard and to be in a position to simply give. He selflessly gives his time, effort, and advice. He has been recognized by many county, city, and state officials for his commitment to the people and surrounding communities. Juan and Anna’s small business has impacted many parts of the community, but

more importantly, every person that walks into the restaurant comes in as a stranger and leaves as a friend.

Juan has opened the restaurant doors to host many political and non-political events at no cost. The restaurant has been slated, unofficially, as a political hot spot. In recent times, Juan organized an open invitational breakfast for Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo and other county and city officials. The significance of this is, he remained open to the public, blending politicians with their constituents. Allowing the community and politicians to be one body of people.

Juan's contributions to society may not include monuments , streets, or buildings named after him. Rather it goes beyond what can be seen. It is the mere selfless legacy of generosity, unification, and perseverance he leaves an impression on. He reinforces that for every dreamer who dares to chase those dreams...to do just that, chase them.