

Indio hospital's founder a foremost citizen

**Dr. Reynaldo Carreón
was influential in LA, too**

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"To wait any longer to solve it, it would appear, is unthinkable stupid." This striking sentence ended an extensive newspaper article about the need for proper planning for hospital services in the Coachella valley in April of 1969.

Unthinkably stupid planning, and lack of proper planning at all, in the public arena is sometimes argued to be the norm. The frustration of waiting for a public solution caused a dedicated group of citizens to do something themselves and not stupidly wait any longer. One such group in Palm Springs succeeded spectacularly in building a fine new hospital, in the middle of the 20th century, with the ability to care for residents and visitors alike even through the long, hot summer.

But to the east, there was still very limited capability. The first doctor in Indio was Harry Smiley. He and his wife, Nell, arrived in the early 1920s en route to Los Angeles when their car broke down. On learning there was no doctor living there, they thought to stay and open an office. In 1926, having decided to live in Indio permanently, they built a fine new adobe house and office (which today houses the spectacular Coachella Valley Museum and Cultural Center.)

Opened in 1928 at the corner of Towne and Miles Avenues, the "Coachella Valley Hospital" was a cluster of small homes, joined together to provide treatment rooms and a few beds. Dr. Russell Gray was in charge, with his wife serving as nurse and cook. By the 1940s Dr. B. Gene Morris added the "Casita Hospital" on the edge of the city of Indio on Miles Avenue.

But health care in the desert was forever changed for the better with the arrival of Reynaldo Carreón. Born in Texas to Mexican parents in 1900, an early



Dr. Reynaldo Carreón COURTESY OF THE DR. CARREÓN FOUNDATION

schoolteacher discouraged him, saying he was not American and his dream of being a physician was a waste of time. But his more imaginative father told him that his dual heritage was a blessing and he would be able to see the best of both cultures and with that knowledge do good in the world.

Through sheer determination and industry, he not only became a doctor, but a highly successful specialist in ophthalmology. He was on staff at the massive Los Angeles County General Hospital, teaching newly minted doctors and encouraging youngsters to aspire to an education. Mindful of his background, he began traveling to Indio, where thousands of workers had no health care, providing free examinations and treatment.

His philanthropic works are too numerous to count and reflect his rich cultural heritage. In World War II, he opened a clinic for disabled and poor and began spending three days per week in the desert. He became an integral part of the community, buying land, and moving permanently from Los Angeles. Frank Bogert, the mayor of Palm Springs, declared him a foremost citizen of the valley.

In order to provide for the eastern Coachella Valley in a fashion equal to Palm Springs, Carreón founded and built Indio Community Hospital in 1966, with three doctor friends and their contractor, on land that he donated for the cause. That little startup hospital of 112 beds (the beginning of JFK Memorial Hospital,) solved the public planning

problem for the eastern valley.

During the Eisenhower administration, Carreón was ambassador-at-large to Central and South America. And he served on the Police Commission in Los Angeles for 16 years and four times as its president. His good works brought him in contact with dignitaries and celebrities all over the world.

But his most important legacy remains the hundreds of valley students he helped to become better educated. Starting with a donation of \$100,000 in 1984 to College of the Desert for scholarships for students of Mexican-American descent. That same year, Indio created Dr. Carreón Boulevard, renaming Avenue 47 in his honor.

His eponymous foundation continues his legacy in education today, administered by a forward-thinking board of directors and an executive director as interesting as Carreón himself.

Ricardo Loretta was raised in a small village in northern Mexico named Dinamita, Durango. His father was sent to the appropriately named village by Dupont to manage an explosives factory. He attended a one-room school where classes were taught in English and Spanish. Like Carreón his background makes him deeply aware of both North and South American cultures.

Loretta went on to graduate from Chapman University and then to work for Ford Motor and Clark Equipment Companies. With business in 46 countries, he traveled extensively and lived in Mexico, Michigan and Brazil. He served on local school boards when his children were young and then in various capacities at University of California, San Diego, University of Southern California, Chapman and Cal State San Bernardino, Palm Desert.

As executive director of the Dr. Carreón Foundation, Loretta carries on the mission of assisting Mexican-American youth achieve their dreams, transforming their lives and those of their families through education and solving public problems with good works, without delay.