Mexico’s Woman of Firsts
By Erin McFee ’07

Marta Sahagún de Fox stepped to the podium after an impressive introduction that listed the long trail of firsts that comprise her life. The first woman to serve as the federal government’s spokesperson in Mexico, de Fox said early on she learned to navigate the male dominated world of politics, spearheading the successful presidential campaign of her now-husband, Vincente Fox. Today, among her many civic roles, she is working with her husband to construct the country’s first presidential library.

Foundations of Philanthropy

In late 2001, de Fox founded Vamos Mexico, a philanthropic organization that works toward improving economic conditions of the people of her country.

“Poor people need to have the same necessities as everybody else,” she said, as she articulated the desire of Mexico to bring in a “humanistic government after nearly 70 years of rule under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).”

De Fox explained the three foundations that drive the passion she has for the people of Mexico: generosity, love, and discipline. Values that were instilled in her by her parents, de Fox remembers the valuable lesson learned from a sign hanging in the office of her father, who was the village doctor: “If you don’t have it, let me know, and you will be seen anyway.”

She said these were the roots of her “understanding of obligation to and love for the people.”

Three Decisions

De Fox stepped into her role as wife of the president of her country with three caveats: she would not be called the First Lady, as it implied there were women in a secondary status to her ─ de Fox believes in equality and transparency, and this would contradict such a philosophy. Also, she would take the opportunity to do something for her people; and, she would not walk behind her husband, as is the custom in her native country.

It was evident to the audience that de Fox’s remarkable lifetime is just a prelude to the work she still has in front of her: that of raising the living standards of everyone in Mexico, and ensuring equal footing for women as their society progresses.

“We have to be able to go to bed at night knowing that we did what we could to make the world better,” concluded de Fox.

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