

# PAYING IT FORWARD

*Grateful for Marianist support, a San Antonio couple share their blessings so others can succeed.*

BY JOHN SCHROEDER

As Rubén Escobedo recalls, his first contact with the Marianists didn't seem particularly encouraging. He'd shown up at St. Mary's University in early 1959 to see if he could transfer into the business school as a second-semester junior.

Short on finances, he'd left Texas Tech University in Lubbock the semester before and hoped to continue his education in his hometown of San Antonio. That's when he met the late Marianist Brother George Kohnen, then dean of the business school. Based on an initially gruff reception, "I had the feeling he might not let me in," Rubén says.

Soon enough, though, the inauspicious beginning blossomed into an unparalleled blessing — one that Rubén has been working to pay forward ever since. "At the time, I didn't realize what was happening," he says. "But in essence, I got an interest-free loan: Brother George let me pay tuition week by week."

A year later, the dean's guidance and mentorship proved even more valuable. Though Rubén ranked second in his graduating class, he didn't attract job offers from local accounting firms. Brother George arranged to have him interview with a national firm, encouraging Rubén to escape the vestiges of discrimination against Mexican-Americans in south Texas.

It was "life-changing" advice, Rubén notes. He worked for more than three years at an accounting firm in New York, gaining confidence in his skills as he worked alongside Ivy League graduates. "That was the best graduate school training I could ever have," he says.

Returning to San Antonio, Rubén founded a highly successful CPA firm and reconnected with the Marianists. Although he'd spent only three semesters at St. Mary's, his time there had been formative.



Rubén and Verónica Escobedo

"The Marianists believe there is no social or economic illness that cannot be cured by education, and I can firmly attest to that," he says, proudly noting that two of his adult children have earned advanced degrees from his alma mater.

The Marianists also instilled in him a spirit of servant leadership. "We are stewards here," he says. "We have a duty to help others, to love as Jesus loved and put our faith into action." Rubén's leadership abilities were put to use when he was named to the university's board of trustees, serving as its chairman for several years.

Rubén and his wife Verónica also have been generous in sharing their treasure with St. Mary's as lead benefactors for the 2011 renovation of Assumption Chapel in Reinbolt Hall, and through a 2014 pledge of \$1 million to establish the university's Center for Catholic Studies.

This year they extended their generosity to the Marianists by making a donation to the Marianist Province "Join Her Mission" (JHM) endowment campaign. Their gift will help ensure Marianist formation of lay leaders — people who will carry forward Marianist schools, retreat centers and ministries in the future.

Their generosity is driven by a conviction that "other young people of limited means have the same opportunities that we had," Rubén says. "It was a godsend to have the Marianists in my life, and I want to share that blessing with others." ■

*John Schroeder is a freelance writer from St. Louis.*

**Join Her Mission:** If you are interested in learning more about the JHM campaign, go to [marianist.com/endowment](http://marianist.com/endowment) or call Allison Hewitt, executive director of development, at 314.338.7215.