

"One girl, not more than eight years old, staggered through the room where the tree was, carrying her baby sister with one arm. With her free hand she collected presents for both of them and carried her burdens outside. Then she propped the baby against the side of the house and gave it a piece of violently red candy."

— Houston Chronicle, 1933.



"One slim, young mother, her black hair tousled from fighting the crowd, squeezed through the press at the front door holding a solemn, wide-eyed baby over her head. 'He's my first one,' she said, as she paused for breath. 'It is the first tree for him. See, niño, these are for you.' And she included the entire pile of presents with a dramatic wave of her hand."

— Houston Chronicle, 1933.

"I remember being there with my mom, my aunt, and my cousin, ... and we each received a small gift. To this day, I remember my gift. It was one of those red plastic baseball bats with the little plastic ball. It was just nice to have that little extra gift and experience with the clinic."

— Elias Cortina, patient family member and San José Clinic Broad of Directors member.

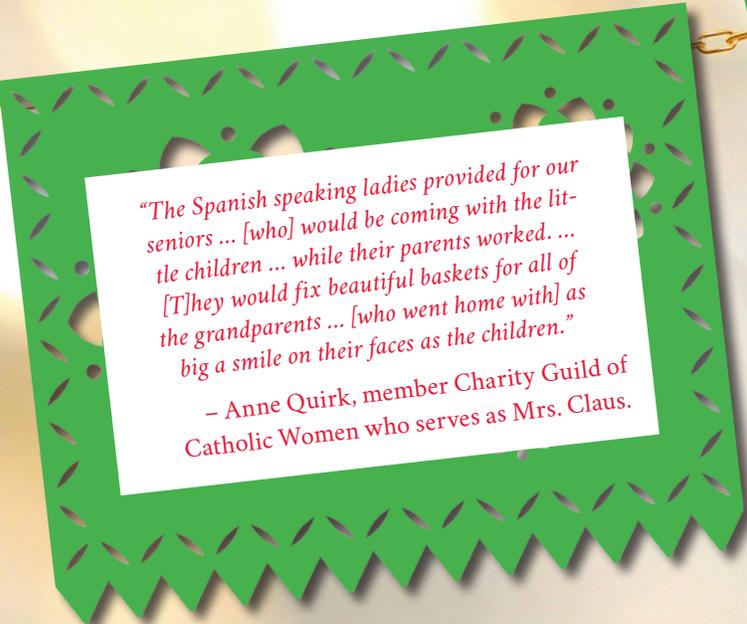
"A Magical Time":

By Celine Pineda

Just five years after the San José Clinic was established in 1922, the local chapter of the National Council of Catholic Women (now the Charity Guild of Catholic Women) began hosting a Christmas celebration for patients and community members, many of whom went without during the holidays. Approximately 300 children attended the first gathering, with infants receiving clothing and toiletries and other children visiting Santa Claus, who gave them toys and bags filled with candy, fruit, and nuts. By 1933, as many as

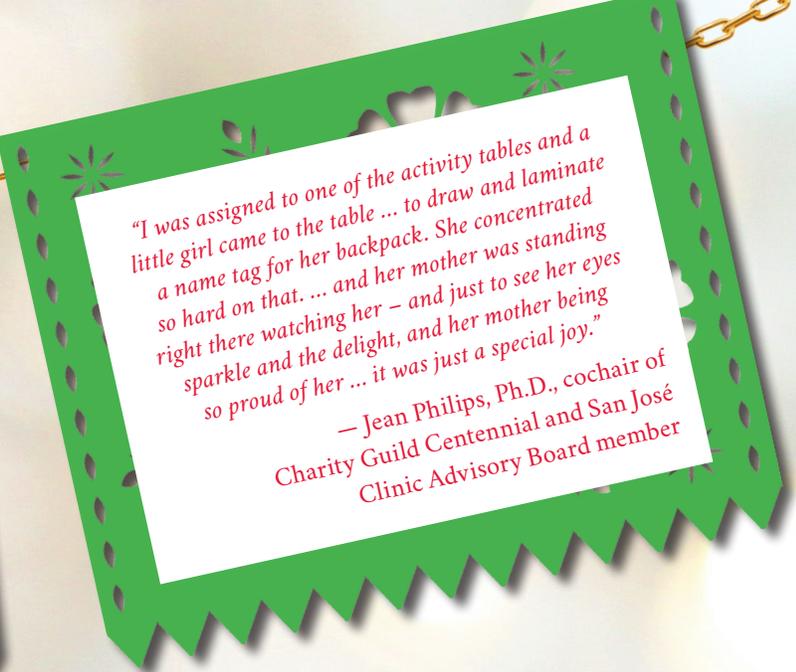
a thousand children, all registered at the clinic, waited with their parents to receive their treasures and celebrate the occasion with friends.¹

Since 1927, those affiliated with San José have gathered in the weeks before the party, collecting and wrapping gifts, chatting over hot chocolate, and sharing prayers of thanks. They spent hours decorating, preparing treats, creating crafts and games, and obtaining food gift cards for the parents to spread Christmas cheer and assure



"The Spanish speaking ladies provided for our seniors ... [who] would be coming with the little children ... while their parents worked. ... [T]hey would fix beautiful baskets for all of the grandparents ... [who went home with] as big a smile on their faces as the children."

– Anne Quirk, member Charity Guild of Catholic Women who serves as Mrs. Claus.



"I was assigned to one of the activity tables and a little girl came to the table ... to draw and laminate a name tag for her backpack. She concentrated so hard on that. ... and her mother was standing right there watching her – and just to see her eyes sparkle and the delight, and her mother being so proud of her ... it was just a special joy."

– Jean Philips, Ph.D., cochair of Charity Guild Centennial and San José Clinic Advisory Board member



"A little boy [was] standing there with his mother, and he had a rather large box in his hands. It was still in the gift-wrapping paper. I said to him, 'Are you going to open your present?' and he said, 'No, I'm going to save it for Christmas morning.'"

– Mary Frances Fabrizio, former San José Clinic board chair and Charity Guild Centennial Committee member.

Christmas at San José Clinic

their patient families that the larger community supported them. Even during COVID-19, volunteers and staff arranged a drive-thru celebration where they handed out gift cards for food and toys, and children received a bakery box with sugar cookies and all the trimmings to decorate them to their heart's content, donated by Pierpont Communications.²

Over the past 100 years, the San José Clinic has witnessed how low-income communities struggle in Houston. The

annual Christmas party leaves a lasting impact on young and old alike, demonstrating the clinic's dedication to the people it serves. Former clinic CEO Stacie Cokinos recalled, "To be able to gather the patients, their children, [and] the volunteers, it was ... always a magical time."³ ○

Celine Pineda is a third-year history student at the University of Houston. She is president of the Indigenous Awareness Association and campus advocate for the education and celebration of Indigenous history and culture.