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Women's Month - Honoring Two Inspiring Women

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On January 6th, 1963, San Pedro saw the birth of Elsa Paz. Along with the rest of the new generation, Elsa attended San Pedro Roman Catholic School and then San Pedro High School graduating in 1980. At a very young age, she joined the San Pedro Leos Club, serving as Vice President for two years.

Elsa's popularity also won her the title of Miss San Pedro, when she was only 14-years-old, in 1977. Since the beginning, Elsa monitored her salary very carefully, saving for one of her hidden passions – painting. As a young child, she

would always find herself sketching various island scenes and was fascinated by the beauty of colors.



Elsa Paz

By 1984, Elsa had saved enough to start her own business, Waterline Gift Shop. Here, she displayed and sold hand-painted T-shirts and souvenirs. What made her shirts special were the picturesque island scenes, and the colorful flora and fauna of San Pedro immortalized on her shirts. This was a perfect souvenir for the growing number of tourists visiting the island. Her vibrant personality and creative energy was also displayed for the period she was manager of Big Daddy's which she soon had rocking. During her term as manager she made many improvements to the entertainment spot of the island.

Having a keen interest in the development of San Pedro and the welfare of its people, Elsa proudly entered the political scene for a while. She has also served as Chairperson for the Trade Licensing Board of San Pedro. Now, six years later, Elsa Paz has been re-elected as Mayor of San Pedro Town, a true inspiration of women countrywide. Below find an interview with Mayor Paz, in light of Women's Week.

You inspire a lot of women not only here on the island but countrywide as well. How does it feel to be a lady that a lot of women look up to?

Well first of all I feel very happy. For Election Day, I was confident we were going to win but I never expected us to win in that high margin. But to be a woman I feel happy and I would like to encourage more women to get involved because it is a big role to be part of the community, you

know, to be in this position as Mayor. It's time that everybody should know that we the women are very hardworking, especially myself; I put a lot of dedication and effort for my community and I am very proud of what my councilors and I have accomplished during my last term. And, I have more courage and energy after these elections, I gained more confidence and I know that I can do more for this community. I have gained more experiences and I now know what my weaknesses are and I am more than willing to work harder along with my councilors to get the job done.

Three years ago you made history being the first woman Mayor, how did that feel? How does it feel knowing that your voters and your island voted you in again and felt that you had done a fantastic job? How does it feel to make history twice?

(Laughs) I feel very proud, this is a great opportunity. Since I am a woman, and for the past three years, I have wanted to show that we women are very powerful, that we are very dedicated. In every organization that I have been involved in, I have noticed that the women that form part of that organization are very serious and dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to the projects at hand. I think that is something that I have wanted to show the island, that I am dedicated and believe that I can accomplish everything I set my mind to. It feels great to be a woman and to show everyone that women can and do get the job done.

This is a man's world, as they say; did you feel pressured to work harder than your male counterparts?

Yes, since I was elected as the first woman mayor, the first thing that clicked in my mind was that I had to work harder to show that women are powerful and that we can do a good job. That was my first belief, that when I got into office and try to do as much as I can just to show men that we can do it and that at times, we women are better at some issues than them. I needed to have not only men, but the entire community, believe that we women can do it. I don't see any reason why we need to have a male as mayor. It is all about putting your time and dedication whether you are a male or female. Time is key to getting your work and projects accomplished.

People are looking up to you as a role model, who do you look up to?

(laughs) Hmmm.... I have a very good friend that has been Mayor for the past six terms in her country and I really admire her. I have known her for the past two years and I believe that she has done a great job. Mayor Licenciada Zoila Milagro Nava has been re-elected for six terms and during that time she has accomplished so much. I really admire what she has done for her municipality.

Six years ago we featured you in the Our Community section. It is just six years and although it may seem as not that much time, a lot has changed in your life. When that article was printed did you know that you would get into politics, what made you get into that field?

No, I went into politics because I have always liked it. In 2003, I was approached by the Area Representative and a couple other UDP representatives. It was a quick decision. At that time they had no Mayoral Candidate available. Two months before elections, Dean Barrow came to the island questioning our branch as to why we did not have a candidate. He suggested that we bring in a representative from the city to represent San Pedro as Mayor. I turned around and told my brother George, "I don't think that that is right." He said, "Well, you run for Mayor." Of course, he was joking but I asked him if I did do it, would he support me, and he answered with an "Of course!" At that moment, I stood up and told the party leader that I would take the challenge and position as candidate. I only had two months to campaign. I had confidence in myself and I tried my best.

Stigmas are being broken about women all the time, especially the one where it is believed that women need to stay at home and not be in the work field. What do you say to that?

I believe that was a strong belief of almost 20 years ago, and although some men still believe that, women should work to try to help the family. With the couple working together, we could have more financially stable family. Women have rights, and if they can do the work they should do it.

What advice do you have for young women?

My advice is to keep studying; education plays an important role; women play a big role in our country. With more young women prepared, then the better our country can progress. They should keep studying and get involved in politics. Fight for your rights and voice your opinions. Who knows, with more education, one of our young women could become the first lady prime minister in the near future. It's all about desire and wanting to do better for themselves and their country.

Mayor of Belize City Zenaida Moya holds a Master's degree in economics from the University of Detroit Mercy in Michigan. She has previously served as the Registrar of Cooperatives and most recently was employed in the public service as the director of the Public Sector Investment Program in the Ministry of National Development, under the Prime Minister's portfolio.

As a trained economist, Mayor Moya has participated actively for the unions in the budget working group this year, during the reformulation of the Prime Minister's controversial budget and was key in demystifying the budget for the National and Trade Union and Commerce of Belize.

Zenaida Moya is the first woman to ever get elected as Mayor of Belize City.

With your recent win, you have become an inspiration to many women countrywide. How does it feel to be a lady that a lot of women look up to?

It's a humbling experience, and I am very honored that the people of Belize City placed their trust in me.

You made history on March 1st as the first female Belize City Mayor, but also as a member of the opposing team. How important was this win to you not only as a politician but as a woman as well?

It was an important one because I believe that this will set the stage for more women to feel empowered enough to step into the political arena. There comes a time when we, as women, need to



Zenaida Moya

shake off that anxiety and fear of being slandered and offer ourselves up for political office simply for the advancement of the country.

This is a man's world, as they say; do you feel pressured to work harder than your male counterparts?

I feel that both sexes have an equal opportunity to advance if they take the initiative to grow and succeed. Women have proven their competence and worth.

People are looking up to you as a role model, who do you look up to?

I look up to God of course, however, on earth I look up to those persons who are willing to give of their time to community service and the advancement of others.

With the coming elections many things were said about you, hurtful and slanderous things, as women we tend to be very emotional, how did you handle that?


Well, I had placed the elections in God's hands and I had told my family and friends that I can handle it, and I was being truthful, every attack that was dished out, I moved on stronger.

What advice do you have for young women?

Ensure that you get an education and set achievable goals; that is the only way you will progress and be the person who God made you to be.

What do you see for the future women of Belize?

I see hope and boundless opportunities. This is since Belizeans are thinking and doing something about problems affecting Belize, and so women, who for a large extent have been advocates for progressive change, equity, justice, and development, will play an even more active role in Belize's economic and social development.

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