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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Famed singer Debbie “La Chicanita” Martinez honored with historic marker**

Celebration for groundbreaking musician and public servant in Albuquerque June 4, 2025

The International Women’s Forum of New Mexico (IWF-NM) and the City of Albuquerque will hold a public dedication ceremony on June 4, 2025, to honor Debbie “La Chicanita” Martinez, a young star of the unique Nuevo Mexico sound of the 1950s and later a lawyer representing immigrants to New Mexico. The newest addition to the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program, Martinez’s marker is part of a twenty-year effort to recognize and celebrate the powerful, often underrepresented role of women in New Mexico history.

One of the youngest in a well known musical family, Martinez grew up surrounded by music, singing with her father and siblings and teaching herself guitar by the time she turned ten years old. At 12 years of age, her recording of “Una Pobre Tambien” became a hit and Debbie Martinez became a star, performing as “La Chicanita,” her father’s nickname for her. With her music on the radio throughout the southwest, she toured extensively, performing in Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, and nationally, including concerts at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and aboard the Queen Mary in Los Angeles.

When her music career was cut short by hearing loss in her early twenties, Martinez returned to school and earned a bachelor’s degree in business from the University of Denver and a law degree from the University of New Mexico. She built her own law practice, helping immigrants in need of legal representation, before working for the state of New Mexico.

On 25 April 2007, Debbie “La Chicanita” Martínez passed away from complications attributed to the spread of cancer. She left a legacy of music, pride in culture, self-determination, and courage for her daughter, her family, friends, and loved ones everywhere. To this day, thanks to “La Chicanita,” it is a New Mexico tradition among Hispano families for young female members to put on a traje, grab a microphone, and belt out a ranchera tune con gusto.

**Celebrating New Mexico trailblazers, past, present, and future**

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*Founded by International Women's Forum - New Mexico, [www.nmwomensforum.com](http://www.nmwomensforum.com)*



## Debbie Martinez marker dedication celebration schedule

June 4, 2025, 10:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.  
Expo New Mexico Villa Hispana  
New Mexico Fairgrounds  
300 San Pedro NE  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87108

Members of the Martinez family are scheduled to speak about her life and legacy, including her brother, New Mexico State Historian Rob Martinez. State and City officials are also expected to attend and make remarks about her remarkable life and contributions. Following the remarks and presentations, a brief ribbon cutting will be held for Martinez's Marker, located at the New Mexico State Fairgrounds Villa Hispana Pavilion, where Martinez loved to perform.

### ***Text for the new Historic Marker for Debbie "La Chicanita" Martinez***

#### *Side 1:*

*"Debbie "La Chicanita" Martínez transformed New Mexican music in the 1970s when she broke into a male-dominated mariachi scene. With a deep, strong, and commanding voice, her vocal talent was evident at a young age, having recorded her first album, *Una Pobre También*, in 1971 at age 13. Debbie popularized a unique genre of music that blended ranchera, mariachi, country, and rock and roll, inspiring future generations of young Hispanas to put on a traje de charro, or mariachi suit, and belt out rancheras.*

#### *Side 2:*

*Debbie Martínez got her first taste of performing with her father's group, *Los Reyes de Albuquerque*, and briefly with her older siblings, *Los Chamacos*, before embarking on her own singing career. She produced five albums in total, toured nationally, and performed at the Smithsonian Institution's Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C., with her family, representing the state of New Mexico. When Debbie lost her hearing in 1983, she earned her law degree from the University of New Mexico and opened an immigration law practice. "*

The new marker is the most recent addition to the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program, established in 2006 to research, recognize, and celebrate the crucial contributions of women past, present, and future to the fascinating and vibrant culture of New Mexico. After two decades of statewide public-private collaboration and support for the program, today more than 120 women in New Mexico history are profiled on roadside markers throughout the state and their contributions are documented on the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program website ([www.nmhistoricwomen.org](http://www.nmhistoricwomen.org)). In partnership with the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), New Mexico Tourism Department, New Mexico Department of Transportation (DOT), and New Mexico Public Education Department (PED), the program is now focused on the future: Educate, inspire, and empower people

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throughout New Mexico by building awareness of the marker program and promoting the role of women in New Mexico history to residents and visitors; cultivating key partnerships; and inspiring new trailblazers through K-12 curriculum, digital archives, improved website capabilities, active social media engagement, permanent and traveling exhibitions, and an active speakers bureau.

Visit us at [www.nmhistoricwomen.org](http://www.nmhistoricwomen.org) to learn more about the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program and the remarkable lives and achievements of Debbie Martinez and other women honored on roadside markers throughout New Mexico.

## Contact Us

The New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program has been brought to life through the skilled, persistent leadership of the IWF-NM Steering Committee volunteers Betty Downes (Chair), Karen Abraham, Veronica Gonzales, Amy McCombs, Nicole Rasmussen, and Paula Tackett.

For more information or to schedule interviews prior to, during, or after the event, please contact Kris Pettersen, Program Manager, at 415-250-3039, [kris@nmhistoricwomen.org](mailto:kris@nmhistoricwomen.org).

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## **Background: History of the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program**

### ***From an idea to a statewide program***

While the state began its Official Scenic Historic Markers program in 1935 to encourage tourism, seven decades later, with nearly 500 markers in place, women were still barely a footnote in 2005. That year, Patricia French, Beverly Duran, and Alexis Girard of the International Women’s Forum–New Mexico launched an effort to set the record straight.

In 2006, with support from New Mexico’s Governor and State Legislature, the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Initiative secured funding to erect roadside markers celebrating women whose actions and influence helped shape the state’s history in ways that continue to impact our culture today. In partnership with the Department of Transportation and Department of Cultural Affairs, and through a statewide nomination process that drew responses from pueblos, tribes, the Navajo Nation, and every county in New Mexico, Historic Women markers began appearing in 2007. Representing the long, diverse and multicultural history of our state, the markers highlight the remarkable courage, resilience, and strength of public figures and ordinary women who faced extraordinary challenges—and changed the course of history.

While the markers spotlight renowned women such as artist Georgia O’Keeffe, suffrage leader Nina Otero-Warren, and San Ildefonso potter Maria Martinez, they also honor and credit lesser-known “unsung heroes” who contributed immensely to the arts, education, business, government, science, military, healthcare, and the growth and preservation of our culture and communities.

Markers celebrate women such as Lozen, an Apache warrior and medicine woman who fought by the side of Geronimo; Sally Rooke, a telephone switchboard operator who died at her post while warning others about the 1908 Dry Cimarrón Flood; and the Ladies Auxiliary of Local 890, who picketed for striking miners who were forbidden from doing so, inspiring the documentary *Salt of the Earth*. While the markers serve as a physical reminder of past accomplishments, the larger goal is to inspire present and future generations by preserving and widely sharing the stories of these remarkable women—educate, inspire, and empower.

The initiative, now known as the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program, received additional funding in 2022 from New Mexico’s Governor and State Legislature for public outreach, K-12 curriculum development, digital archives, improved website capabilities, permanent and traveling exhibitions, and a speakers bureau. As the program grows, additional strategies and new partnerships and support will celebrate the exceptional women who continue to help make New Mexico the Land of Enchantment.

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The result of two decades of effort and commitment, the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program now celebrates the lives and accomplishments of more than 100 women who have contributed to New Mexico's fascinating history and unique culture.

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