

**Press Release written for the El Paso Times Newspaper,  
by Jose Villescás, Burges 59er's own "Jumpin' Joe #24."**



## **BURGES HIGH SCHOOL** **Home of the MIGHTY Mustangs, CLASS OF** **1959 –** **THE SPIRIT OF THE 50'S**

### **THE SPIRIT OF THE 50'S: THE MIGHTY MUSTANGS OF BURGES HIGH AT HALF CENTURY**

High school reunions abound throughout the summer and well into the homecoming celebrations of autumn football. 5, 10, even 25 year anniversaries are lots of fun. However, 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries are uniquely special.

A half century after those young Mustangs last gathered in force, vintage 59er Mustangs will stream in to El Paso from all points on the compass during the 9-13<sup>th</sup> of September.

For many, it will end a long absence from El Paso. For many more, those who elected to remain here, it will be an opportunity to renew old friendships & associations forged so long ago.

To place matters into perspective: Burges High School was then the new kid on the educational block. The enrollment was highly diversified. Because of overlapping district lines, the student body was comprised of students from not only the burgeoning east side (the now "old" Cielo Vista area, but from central EL Paso, the

lower valley (Clardy Fox, Ascarate), and military students from the on and off-post housing of Fort Bliss and Biggs Field. The result: a very cosmopolitan blend of kids from various economic and social backgrounds. We even had an international A.F.S. exchange student from Sweden.

Not only were we blessed with a magnificent new physical plant - spacious rooms, lustrous halls, state of the art chemistry, physics, & biology labs, there was a beautiful Speech Room, an impressive library, and the best maple-floored gymnasium in the city.

Most importantly, we had a faculty 2<sup>nd</sup> to none. This outstanding corps of educators mentored us in French, Spanish, the fine Arts, Latin, and all the mathematics you could hope for not to mention a great Art department.

Gifted educators such as Gladine Beaver, Sue Archer, and Olga Abraham led us to a master of the English tongue. Similarly, Genevieve Gonzalez & Evangelina Ramirez guided us through the intricate declensions of Spanish and the ultimate appreciation of Cervantes. We developed a keen understanding of world affairs & civics via the teaching skills of Alice White. Ms. Hicks and Wilmoth Matthews prepared us in physiology & chemistry while Dr. Smith took his neophyte physicists under his wing in the physics lab.

One had to make a conscious effort NOT to learn in such a positive surrounding. In retrospect, it is no wonder that a higher than average number of graduates subsequently pursued post secondary education.

When we were through, as Chuck Berry's lyrics described, "...working our fingers right down to the bone...", we looked forward to the full complement of athletic activities available to us.

Yes, in the early years the Ponies took more than their share of beatings. It does build character. By '59, however, as trail blazers we were laying down some tradition. Among the many outstanding coaches in the various sports, a few stood out heads and shoulders. Our ALL ARMY, ALL GULF STATES triple threat basketball coach Art Ranew taught us to be humble in victory and accept defeat with dignity. Our own expatriate from La Bronx and a NEW MEXICO UNIVERSITY "LOBO LEGEND", quiet & gentlemanly, John J. Leonard led his charges by example. Then there was the ever popular John Birkhead who lent his many talents as football and track coach. Our trainer, WWII air force vet (& former POW) John Russell, patched us up and kept us in the fray.

The Mustangs of 2009 may owe much of their longevity, and certainly whatever success they have met with, to this well balanced melding of classroom, physical education, and the multiplicity of extracurricular student activities.

The 1959 Mustangs were very much a blend of George Lucas' AMERICAN GRAFFITI & Copolla's RUMBLEFISH, with Pass of the North flavoring. Stuff did happen. It always does. Some drag racing, an occasional "disagreement", and yes, there was smoking in the boy's rest room.

Race relations: no problem. "Differences", economic or otherwise: definitely. Score: pretty solid, pretty positive on the whole.

The very fact that so many of the 176 class members will be attending the reunion is testimony to the fact that those friendships and associations from long ago have withstood the test of time and distance.

The Mustang "missing" number about 50. Because of that we are uncertain if any were lost in Viet Nam (we had an excellent ROTC program). Additionally, and lamentably, our "IN MEMORIUM" list grows with each passing year. Our wonderful faculty is now down to a handful or less.

In that last August of 1959 life was good. Ike was in the White House. An unprecedented wave of prosperity cascaded over the country. India & China were rattling sabers. The Eidenoff murder trial dominated the local press. The editors of the TIMES and the HERALD-POST were feuding again. Demographically, Hispanics had just passed the 51% mark in our population. At our incomparable Plaza Theatre, Gregory Peck was soldiering bravely in the Korean War epic "Pork Chop Hill". El Paso had a new mayor, Raymond Telles. Mayor Telles had been awarded the Silver Star in Korean combat. He was but one of many of our brave homegrown veterans. Interstate 10 was in its infancy. The "Jackson Twins" ruled the comic pages. Elvis lived. Elvis rocked.

Across the river in our sister city of Ciudad Juarez, the magnificent matador Procuna would tempt death in the afternoon sands of the Balderas Bullring.

In the heart of our bustling downtown the clang of the international trolley's bell amidst a swirl of pigeons was both an acoustical and visual delight. And somewhere on a bluff off north Mesa, Marty Robbins, smitten by the whirling lovely Felina - composed "El Paso".

Toss in Alaska & Hawaii as our 49<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> states and that about rounds out our Mustang version of an H.G. Wells hot rod 4 carb-dual exhaust time machine.

None of us has any illusions of the intervening physical changes. State of health will also be a concern for many of us. The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion of the Mighty Mustangs of Burges High School will not be at a full gallop, nor kick up a dust storm of the same magnitude as in 1959. But through our collective life's experience we will be ever so much more aware of our visionary Director, Don Mitchell's last words to us:

*“Through the doors of Burges High School walk those who have been blessed with the opportunity of going to school in a free America, where opportunities are great and responsibilities even greater.*

*Burges is dedicated to the belief that an enlightened citizenry means a democratic nation, where people have learned through self-discipline, sacrifice and hard work that freedom is not a gift but something for which all must be willing to die if the need arises.*

*It is the hope of the faculty and administration of Burges that each of you, by having been a student at Burges, in some way may have a most wholesome and useful life in what we trust will continue to be a free America.”*

