



Top row from left: (kids) Lucy Esquivel, Oliver Esquivel, Leo Esquivel, Gabby Gray, Harper Esquivel, Will Gray **Bottom Row:** Darby Davis, Margaret Esquivel Davis, Layla Davis, Hector Esquivel, Dr. Hector Esquivel, Barbara Esquivel, Eric Esquivel, Layla Esquivel, Stephanie Esquivel and Landon Esquivel

FIRST FAMILIES OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

THE ESQUIVELS

BY LUANA M. GRAVES SELLARS
PHOTO BY FAITHOGRAPHY

The Bible says, "Honor a physician with the honor due unto him..." and **Dr. Hector Esquivel has lived a life of service that deserves the highest honor and respect.**

His memory book is a testament to this life and contains handwritten and typed notes and letters from his grateful patients, thanking him for his "kindness and gentleness." It also includes nearly 100 newspaper clippings that were titled: "A Message of Thanks," "My Heartfelt Thanks," "I Wish to Extend My Grateful Appreciation," "My Sincere Thanks," "Many Thanks." These words from his patients conveyed the deep feelings of love and appreciation for this man who has dedicated his life to others.

Esquivel knew from his early childhood that he was going to be a doctor. He left home at an early age to study medicine. We expect a high level of caring from doctors, and most doctors do have a high level of selflessness, and a desire to facilitate the healing of others. But Esquivel is no ordinary man and no ordinary doctor. Of course, he has the framed certificates that affirmed his qualifications as a surgeon, but more impressive are his additional endorsements – ones that distinguish him from the ordinary, and further elevate him above his peers.

Born in Columbia, South America, Hector Esquivel Sr. left home at a young age to pursue a better life in America as well as to perfect his craft as a surgeon. Following successful careers at Temple University Hospital and as the chief of staff of Locust Mountain Hospital in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, Esquivel and his family relocated to Hilton Head in 1983. The island had a completely different look back then. U.S. 278 was nothing but a long stretch of trees.

"I remember when the main source of income for the town of Bluffton was speeding tickets," Esquivel says. Life here was much simpler then.

On the island, the Esquivel family stood out because of their heritage, their cultural identity and the language they spoke. And yet, they were determined to fit in and to become an integral part of their new community in South Carolina. Generational lessons became rooted in a strong system of values and the desire to give to others. Even the Esquivel children ended up becoming role models at a young age. "In school, since I was the only Spanish-speaking kid there, I was the ESOL program. Every time a new Latino child came to the school, they would pair us together," says Esquivel's son, Eric.

Considered to be among the first professional Hispanic families to live on the island for more than 30 years, the Esquivels have been working to improve the lives of Hispanics. On staff as a surgeon at Low Country General Hospital in Ridgeland and Beaufort Memorial Hospital, Esquivel is well-known for being an empathetic, soft-spoken and humble doctor with a gentle disposition and a generous spirit.

Esquivel says that he's slowly cutting back at his practice in Ridgeland – though he admits he is experiencing withdrawal symptoms as he moves away from the operating room, which he calls a "majestic place." Today, even though Esquivel says that he is retired, he continues to give to those who are less fortunate. He spends his days accepting patient calls on his cellphone, seeing patients and providing not only low- or no-cost medical services to locals who do not have insurance, but he makes house calls and, when necessary, he even drives his patients to the hospital.

Currently, he is opening up a small office in the La Isla Magazine offices, where he will

be working without a staff. He doesn't think he's doing anything unusual or realize the impact that he is having on the community as he cares for those who are underserved.

"I never feel that I'm doing too much of anything," he says. "I only wanted to bridge the gap for Hispanic people who needed medical care, but didn't have access to good quality care or the ability to afford it."

Esquivel and his wife of more than 48 years, Barbara, are role models for their three children. They instilled in their children a strong set of values: work hard, have a strong sense of culture, be true to yourself, and always give something back to the community.

These lessons were not lost on the children. His eldest son, Hector Jr., is a local immigration attorney who works to educate and bridge legal gaps in information for the area's local Hispanic population. Eric is the publisher of La Isla Magazine, whose mission is to provide a Spanish-language magazine that connects the diverse Lowcountry Hispanic community and is a resource for information, events and entertainment.

In addition to the magazine, Eric and Hector Jr. are founding members of the Lowcountry Immigration Coalition, which has been instrumental in challenging the state on immigration laws that discriminate against Hispanics and provides accurate information to immigrants.

When asked how he would describe his father, Eric says, "he is my hero. He is and has lived the American dream. He has never let anything get in the way of what he needs to get done; he gets it done through determination, hard work and motivation. He just wants to be in service to others."

Together, the family has built a network of connections that reach often underserved Hispanics in the Lowcountry. Today, the family is often considered the face and voice of Lowcountry Latinos, and the Esquivels have taken on a role that few people would dare attempt. The Esquivels have dedicated their lives to improve not only the lives of all of the Latinos in our community, but to help non-Latinos better understand the similarities and differences in their culture.

"To have a business that does good works in our culture and to be a resource and live in the South is the best of all worlds," Eric says. **M**

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