



## MACPS CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY 2020 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE IRENE RIOJAS RODRIGUEZ

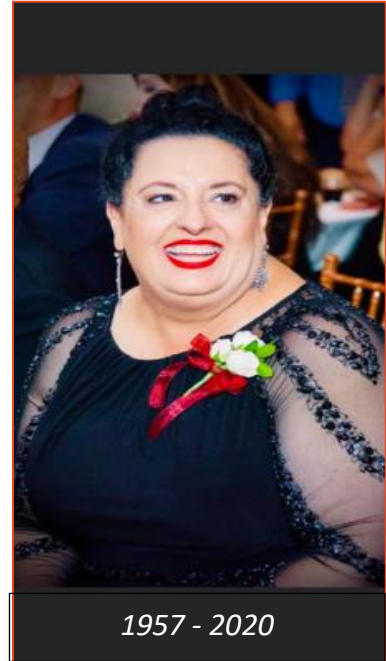
24 YEARS IN CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY

In the 24 years (1994 to 2018) that Irene Rodriguez worked to promote public education in Child Passenger Safety (CPS) and Injury Prevention; Irene broke ground and opened doors to reach underserved Latino, Black and Native American families nationwide. Her passion, expertise and leadership has positively impacted awareness, education, legislation and resources in the field of Child Passenger Safety.

### **Enduring Contributions:**

Irene and a team of bilingual CPS Certified Technicians/Instructors under her direction, developed the Glossary of CPS Technical Vocabulary in Spanish for NHTSA's CPS Certification Training Curriculum in 2001. The addition of this resource was timely and continues to be valuable for many CPS Instructors and technicians nationwide. Irene also played a major role with NHTSA committees in the process to translate, review, pilot and disseminate the Spanish CPS Curriculum. When it came time to pilot the first CPS Certification class in Spanish; Irene was the Lead Instructor. Later in her career, Irene had the opportunity to teach a class to certify technicians from Mexico and eventually offer a Checkup Event in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico with the technicians from this class. Irene led by example when it came to opening doors, expanding education and making lasting connections to provide CPS resources to bilingual and Spanish-speaking communities.

For fifteen years, (2003-2018), Irene conducted CPS Certification Training every year for Puerto Rican Firefighters. By law, all ninety-one (91) Fire Stations on the island of Puerto Rico are designated Permanent CPS Fitting Stations. *La Comisión para la Seguridad en el Tránsito* in Puerto Rico partnered with Irene to make sure every fire station in Puerto Rico would have CPS Certified Technicians. As of, 2018, most, if not all of Puerto Rico's Firefighters who are CPS Certified Technicians have attended Irene's classes. Irene was instrumental in the passage of Puerto Rico's legislation to



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include the use of booster seats. She was also involved in the distribution of booster seats nationwide through the Boost America Project.

Working with the USAA Educational Foundation, Irene travelled with a team of CPS Instructors to conduct classes and certify CPS Technicians on Military Bases nationwide. In addition to the experience of going to more than 30 different states; the team will always remember the class at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas, during the September 11, 2001 attack. The instructors and participants rose to the challenge of completing the course under very difficult circumstances.

*Corazón de Mi Vida*, a NHTSA national child passenger safety initiative was developed and implemented with Irene's coordination and expertise to bring culturally meaningful and language appropriate CPS education to Latino communities. The success of this initiative has greatly expanded outreach to underserved families.

When Meharry Medical College, a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) was designated as the Tennessee Child Passenger Safety Center by the Tennessee Governor's Safety Office; Irene was selected to implement statewide CPS training for Law Enforcement Officers, Firefighters, EMS Technicians and Day Care Providers. Through Irene's efforts, these individuals earned CPS Technician Certification which made it possible for their respective agencies to become designated CPS Fitting Stations.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs partnered with Irene to bring awareness and education about CPS to the Navajo Nation. In this community as with all other communities; Irene's expertise, passion and true spirit of service earned her trust and professional respect to make lasting impact and positive change.

**New Frontiers and Positive Impact:**

Irene was one of the first Texans distributing safety seats and providing safety seat education for underserved populations in 1994, when the Texas Legislature authorized the first State-managed Child Safety Seat Distribution Program. In 1998, Irene, along with other pioneers in the field of CPS, attended one of the first NHTSA National Child Passenger Safety Certification classes. Her Instructor number is I0036, and is a reminder of how much growth the field of CPS has seen during her career. Irene's work with numerous foundations and corporations included serving as technical advisor for State Farm Insurance on a video shoot in Mexico City promoting the importance and correct use of safety seats. This video aired

on *Sábado Gigante*, a Spanish language television program broadcast by International Network in the United States. Irene promoted NHTSA's *Corazón de Mi Vida* CPS initiative on an interview in Univision's internationally viewed morning show, *Despierta America*; filmed in Miami, Florida. When Ford Motor Company held their Centennial Anniversary Celebration in Detroit, Michigan, Irene provided CPS education on Family Day for attendees and held a Car Seat Checkup Event.

### **Inspiring by Example:**

Irene's ability to communicate, teach, motivate and inspire others allowed her to frequently be the voice, and the face, to promote CPS awareness both formally and informally as she saw the opportunity to educate and demonstrate the value of CPS in saving lives.

It is impossible to list the number of classes, checkup events, conference presentations, panel discussions, board memberships, parent meetings, press conferences, observational research, committee work and CPS service in Irene's resume. However, there is no doubt that both in volume and quality, her work has been exceptional.

### **NOTABLES**

- 1994 - Texas Department of Health, Public Health Promotions: Responded to Spanish calls that came in on the 1-800 telephone number for child passenger safety for the state of Texas Injury Prevention – the 800 number later was moved to the Department of Injury Prevention. State managed child seat distribution program was authorized by the Texas Legislature in 1994. Worked with statewide distribution program of car seats and bilingual car seat education programs for underserved populations. The NHTSA National Child Passenger Safety Certification program was developed in 1998. She became a nationally certified instructor in 1998 and her instructor number was I0036.
- 1999 - USAA Educational Foundation: Traveled with a team of instructors to military bases nationwide to certify child passenger safety technicians. During the September 11, 2001 attacks her team was at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, TX. They made adjustments and were able to continue the course under difficult situations. Was part of the Boost America nationwide distribution of booster seats.
- 2001 - National Latino Children's Institute: With the request from Carmen Torrent from NHTSA, was asked to assemble a committee of bilingual certified

technicians/instructor to develop a glossary of CPS technical terms that was added as a resource to the CPS Certification Curriculum. Eventually the CPS Certification Curriculum was offered in Spanish and she served on the committee in which they translated and reviewed the final dissemination of the Spanish Curriculum. Irene was the lead instructor that pilot tested the first taught Spanish CPS Certification Course. During her time with NLCI, she hosted a Spanish course where they recruited participants from Mexico to take the course and they eventually held the first CPS checkup event in Piedras Negras, Coahuila Mexico with the technicians we had certified.

- Irene implemented the NHTSA Corazon de Mi Vida, a Spanish child passenger safety initiative for the Latino community nationwide and in Puerto Rico. She was asked to speak and organize an event in Mexicali, Baja California Mexico that borders Calexico, CA. She spoke to Spanish speaking-only parents about car seats and then hosted a car seat event.
- 2004 - 2005 Served on the National Child Passenger Safety Board
- 2003 - 2018 Taught the CPS Certification Training in Puerto Rico  
Irene taught the CPS Certification course in San Juan Puerto with the Comisión para la Seguridad en el Tránsito in English with the Spanish glossary before it was translated to Spanish. She continued to go every year to teach the course in Spanish until 2018 and was instrumental in certifying the fire fighters on the island. The Governor passed a law that all fire stations would become permanent fitting stations with certified CPS technicians at all of the fire stations on the island. Irene was instrumental in their efforts to improve their child passenger laws to include booster seats.
- 2006 - 2007 Meharry Medical College (HBCU Historically Black College/University) The Tennessee Governor's Safety Office designated Meharry Medical College as the administrator of its Tennessee Child Passenger Safety Center. Irene implemented the statewide train-the-trainer intervention that taught law enforcement Officers, day care providers, fire fighters and EMS the 32-hour course to certified them as CPS technicians and then designated their agency as a CPS fitting station.

- 2008 - 2017 Texas A&M Transportation Institute. During her time with TTI, she continued to teach in Texas and Puerto Rico the CPS course. Irene also conducted observational research at daycare centers statewide for non-use and incorrect use of safety seats.
- Irene had been a certified CPS instructor for 22 years. (I0036 instructor number) and was certified at the time of her death.
- Served on the board (multiple terms) of the Safe Kids Austin led by Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas.
- Partnered with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and taught the CPS Certification Course at the Navajo Nation.
- Served as technical advisor with State Farm on a video shoot in Ciudad de Mexico (Mexico City). Video was produced on the importance of safety seats and correct use that was aired on Sábado Gigante. Sábado Gigante is a Spanish-language television program broadcast by Spanish International Network in the United States.
- Was interviewed on Despierta America, a Spanish morning show on Univision, with international news filmed in Miami, Florida about NHTSA Corazon de mi Vida, a Spanish child passenger safety initiative for the Latino community nationwide and in Puerto Rico.
- Participated in Detroit, Michigan at the Ford Motor Company Celebration of their 100<sup>th</sup> Centennial Anniversary. Provided education about child passenger safety on family day and held a car seat checkup event.

