



September 2018 Her Story ENewsletter

Food Glorious Food!

Ella Brennan, a well-known, well respected New Orleans restaurant owner, nurtured celebrity chefs, but didn't believe it appropriate to worship them, "A restaurant is not a church, where you have to be quiet and kneel," she said. Brennan, whose family owned more than a dozen different restaurants, died earlier this year. Thinking of her reminded us to share the story of two other remarkable women in the food business: Romana Bañuelos and Ruth Fertel.

Romana Acosta Bañuelos is remembered for being the first Latina Treasurer of the United States, but there is much more to her story. Born in Arizona to parents who had emigrated from Mexico, she and her family were sent back to Mexico during the mass deportations of the Great Depression. She was educated in Mexico through the sixth grade. Married at 15 years of age and the mother of two sons by age 18, she later divorced and moved to Los Angeles. There, she invested in a tortilla business that became Ramona's Mexican Food Products, Inc. and later Ramona's Food Group. Her tortilla business grew to include other Mexican foods such as tamales and frozen wrapped burritos.



Romana Banuelos

Bañuelos worked with a group of businessmen to establish a bank, the Pan American Bank. Many Mexican-Americans learned how to handle money transactions through this bank; this led to economic and community growth as people bought homes and started businesses. Bañuelos was asked to submit her name for U.S. Treasurer, but she did not expect to be selected. She was appointed by President Nixon in 1971. After her resignation in 1974, she returned to her work with Ramona's. The company which she founded in 1947 is still in business today.



Ruth Fertel

Like Ella Brennan, Ruth Fertel's restaurant story is based in New Orleans. Trying to find a way to afford to send her sons to college, Fertel saw an advertisement in the local newspaper seeking a buyer for Chris Steak House. Not knowing anything about the restaurant business and against the advice of everyone she knew, she mortgaged her house and bought the restaurant in 1965. She hired single mothers as her staff and was the only restaurant in New Orleans with an all-female wait staff. Within six months, she was earning double her previous salary and her restaurant became the 'watering hole' for politicians, businessmen, reporters, and athletes.

After a fire in 1976, she purchased a second property, but in accordance with her purchase agreement for the original restaurant, had to name it Ruth's Chris Steak House. She also issued her first franchise and in 1977, a second Ruth's Chris Steak House opened in Baton Rouge. In 1999, she sold her chain of restaurants. They still operate today under the Ruth's Chris Steak House name.

Romana Bañuelos and Ruth Fertel are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

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