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## S. A. Life



### Grads give back to UTSA with endowment

Web Posted: 02/13/2006 12:00 AM CST

**Elaine Ayala**  
Express-News Staff Writer

Natalie and Andrea Hall don't seem embarrassed, at first, to say they daydreamed about opening up a law firm together someday.

Hall & Hall Attorneys at Law, they'd imagined the sign would read.

Just seconds after saying this, however, the fraternal twins and graduates of UTSA's Honors College, laugh out loud and get red-faced — together, as they do so many things.

Though the dream didn't come true, they came close. Both are successful, financially independent women. Natalie is an attorney; Andrea, a real estate agent.

At 29, they are now the first graduates of UTSA's Honors College to endow a scholarship, another double achievement for the Halls in a steady stream of them, university officials say.

The Halls were beneficiaries of the opportunities the Honors College extends to students. Its mission is to provide an enriched educational experience for its most talented students, and by doing so, attract more talented students, says Ann Eisenberg, its associate dean and the person the Hall twins identify as their major cheerleader.

Starting with a \$10,000 gift they hope to grow, the Halls want the scholarship to go to promising, needy students, much like they were. And they want it to "immortalize" the names of the two people they most admire and who most guaranteed their success, their parents, the Rev. Eddy Hall and Mary Olivo Hall.

"That's why Natalie and I wanted to do this endowment," Andrea says. "Because we would not be the people we are without them."

They'll thank them publicly Thursday at a fundraiser that's become synonymous with the still-young Honors College — the sixth annual Great Conversation! La Sobremesa, which brings together community leaders and citizens for big talk at small tables, 60 tables, to be exact.

At each one, a leader breaks bread with a

**Great Conversations Event**

UTSA Great Conversation! La Sobremesa, a dinner-party-style event in which 60 community leaders conduct as many conversations

When: 6:30 p.m. Thursday

- **Where:** Institute of Texan Cultures
- **Goal:** Raise funds for UTSA's Honors College scholarships
- **Tickets:** \$75, alumni \$50; table sponsorships still available
- **Among the leaders:** Former Gov. Dolph Briscoe, author Sandra Cisneros, Mayor Phil Hardberger, political consultant Lionel Sosa, County Judge Nelson Wolff, glass artist Gini Garcia and attorney Jane Macon
- **Among the topics:** Libraries of the Future, How to Make Premium Wine, Latino-Black-Jewish Dialogues, the Second Amendment, the Narcoeconomy and How the Latino Voter Is Changing American Politics
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group and engages them in conversations ranging from U.S.-China relations and Social Security to the secrets of success and aging gracefully.

[www.utsa.edu/greatconversation](http://www.utsa.edu/greatconversation)

There was a lot of emotion in the Halls' decision to endow a scholarship. It's not just that they're grateful for their parents. They are. It's not just that they want to show their appreciation. They do.

For the Hall family, much looked idyllic, but they bore their trials.

Eddy Hall was a Vietnam veteran and San Antonio narcotics police officer when he saw Mary Olivo, a single mom with a young daughter, in a Luby's cafeteria more than 30 years ago. Their chemistry must have been overpowering, their daughters say, because the couple married 10 days later. Friends described their mom then "as a young Liz Taylor," Natalie says. "That's why my dad married her in 10 days."

The attractive couple made a family: Sister Tina is seven years older than the twins. "Dad's all gray because of all girls," Natalie says.

The impact of Vietnam may have contributed to that, too.

"Our father was exposed to Agent Orange during the war," Andrea says, referring to the chemical defoliant many veterans believed was responsible for post-war ailments, but which the government long denied.

Over the years, he had several diagnoses. A portion of his lung was removed because of a disease called sarcoidosis. He has diabetes and heart disease. He's on a waiting list for a liver transplant. In 1978, the Mayo Clinic gave him two years to live. "He's a walking miracle," Natalie says.

During the twins' first few years at UTSA, both their parents essentially were disabled. Mary Hall suffered a head injury that caused brain damage and temporary memory loss requiring five years of rehabilitation.

Faith and heritage set Eddy and Mary Hall apart, Andrea says, instilling both empathy and a unique view of discrimination. Mary Hall remembers segregation at the Majestic Theatre, which permitted her a seat only in the balcony. "Mom said it was a better view," referring to the theater's balcony. "To this day, she says that."

"She could have gone to Incarnate Word to be a nurse, which is what she wanted to do," Natalie says. "But she had to work." Much later, Mary Hall earned her Texas real estate license and opened Hall & Associates. She was named one of the top 50 real estate agents in San Antonio the past two years. Andrea now works in the family business.

After his retirement from the police department, Eddy Hall became a pastor, taking his inter-denominational ministry to jails, under bridges, to homeless shelters and before drug addicts. His experience in the narcotics unit drove him to serve such populations, his daughters say.

They went along as the singing twins, Natalie says, "to Victoria Courts, the SAMM shelter, Victory Church, jails, since we were 4 years old. We sang hymns, country-western, whatever people requested."

They realized they were have-nots when they asked for Cabbage Patch dolls one Christmas and got another kind. "Our parents told us, 'Girls, we just couldn't afford it,'" Andrea says. "It was the first time we knew we weren't rich."

That wouldn't affect their academics. They graduated from Churchill High School as co-valedictorians. Though they didn't score well on their SATs, they both got into the Honors College with strong grade point averages. And, like so many other UTSA students, they're first-generation college graduates.

While their parents always encouraged them to take advantage of every opportunity to "go, go, go," Andrea says, the twins wanted to remain close by.

"Teachers told us we were selling ourselves so short by choosing UTSA," says Natalie. Once their parents were convinced of their daughters' determination, "Our mother saw the potential of being big fishes in a little pond," Natalie says.

After graduation, the Halls headed to Baylor University: Natalie to law school, Andrea to the seminary. Both graduated in 2003. Andrea wanted to pursue a doctorate in theology, but, when she came home and started working with her mother, she decided to get a real estate license and earned one in a few weeks. "I'm addicted to it. I've always wanted to serve people," she says. "It's the same thread (as ministry)."

Now, in financial positions to endow a scholarship, the twins consider it an

anniversary gift. On Feb. 27, their parents will celebrate 30 years of marriage.

They see this as a way to repay the Honors College, too. Both were recipients of many scholarships. "We prayed about it," Natalie says of the gift, wondering whether it should go to Hispanic students only. "At the end of the day, it doesn't matter who they are," she says of its eventual recipients. "If they have a need, meet it."

The Halls have another treat coming their way. Their daughters have purchased a table for Thursday's event and will sit with Archbishop Emeritus Patrick Flores, who'll be leading a great conversation.

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