PSB Chair Makes an Impact

Next month, our Public Service Board Chair Dr. Kristina Mena will be honored as one of El Paso Inc’s Women of Impact, and at El Paso Water, we could not be prouder and more appreciative of her contributions.

Dr. Mena serves as the El Paso Campus Dean for the University of Texas - Houston School of Public Health. She is an environmental microbiologist and a renowned expert in human health risk assessment. With her public health and epidemiological skills, El Paso Water has benefited from her expertise on a range of water quality issues, and we were incredibly fortunate to have her on the Board as we navigated the pandemic.

In addition to publishing dozens of articles and book chapters, Dr. Mena served two terms on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Science Advisory Board and its Drinking Water Committee (serving under both the Obama and Trump presidential administrations) and serves on advisory boards for the WateReuse Research Foundation and the National Water Research Institute.

As EPWater plans to expand its water reuse program with the future Advanced Water Purification Facility, Dr. Mena has been instrumental in advising EPWater on water reuse topics. She shares her scientific and risk assessment expertise as part of outreach efforts to help our community understand the safety and reliability of water purification processes.

COVID advisor

When COVID-19 started emerging in the headlines in early 2020, she was one of my first calls. At that point, COVID was a big black box. No one knew how widespread it would become, how long it would last or how unpredictably mild or serious it could be.

Dr. Mena offered sound, reasonable and non-political, practical guidance that helped EPWater understand what precautions made sense and how to detect and curb the spread of the virus within the workforce. At a very early point in 2020, we were offering both testing and antibody testing for employees as a result of her insights. We urged social distancing, sanitizing efforts and provided KN-95 masks to employees. In early 2021, we began making vaccinations available to any employee who was interested.

She also provided expertise and an important voice in helping the El Paso community navigate its COVID-19 response and recovery. She serves on the El Paso United COVID-19 Task Force and the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine COVID-19 Panel. Through the pandemic, she advised local businesses on workplace safeguards and provided extensive re-opening guidance to El Paso County school districts to minimize exposure and reduce the spread of COVID. She also served on a statewide UTHealth Novel Coronavirus Task Force, which provided public health research and data to Texas Governor Greg Abbott.

In El Paso, we have a lot to be proud of with our COVID-19 response. While we mourn community members, including several utility employees who passed away, we have taken actions to protect our neighbors, and we have embraced the vaccine. I credit Dr. Mena, in part, for her advisory role in so many forums that served to unite rather than divide us in our response. We are fortunate to have her leading the Public Service Board and as a driving force in our community.

Dr. Kristina Mena

Dr. Mena touring our International Water Quality Laboratory.

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On the Water Front is a publication of El Paso Water.

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