



Olvera Street Shop Owners Bring Generations of Mexican History to DTLA

By Matthew G. Marquez

Located steps away from LA Union Station, El Pueblo is known as the birthplace of the City of Los Angeles. Established in 1787, El Pueblo is home to Olvera Street—one of LA’s renowned tourist destinations and historical landmarks. Since the 1930s, Olvera Street has become home to a traditional Mexican marketplace for many Mexican small business owners and local artists.

Norma and Valerie Garcia, owners of [Casa California](#) on Olvera Street, preserve generations of rich Mexican American history as they offer their customers artifacts from various regions of Mexico. Their story on Olvera Street begins with Norma’s husband, Mike Garcia, who became a shoe shine boy on Olvera St. in the 1930s—he was only 7 years old when he started. The Garcias eventually opened up their shop, Casa California, in the early 1960s. Now in its 54th year of business, Casa California offers an array of religious statues, pottery pieces, and items commemorating the Day of the Dead. A mother and daughter duo, Norma and Valerie focus on obtaining items from the different regions of Mexico, in hopes that it will bring customers a little bit closer to their hometowns.

As longtime merchants, the Garcias have seen many generational changes at El Pueblo—while many original families have long left the area. Despite these generational changes, the merchants at Olvera St. maintain a sense of community through events and celebrations held throughout the year.

Many more changes will be shaping the future of El Pueblo, as Metro’s [LA Union Station Forecourt and Esplanade Improvements](#) project plans to provide pedestrian and bicycle enhancements and improve the connection between El Pueblo, [LA Union Station](#), and other surrounding communities. The project is currently under environmental review, with construction anticipated to begin in 2020. One of the key elements of the project includes an expanded and raised crosswalk on Alameda Street, connecting LA Union Station and the El Pueblo Historic Cultural Monument. The enhancement will create a direct and safer pedestrian pathway between the two destinations.

Norma and Valerie Garcia are optimistic about the forthcoming project. They hope it will open up the area and make it easier for pedestrians to access and visit El Pueblo. They do have concerns about the local flavor of the area being preserved, as a number of developments and projects are in the works nearby. It is their hope that projects will take this into consideration when building.



To learn more about Casa California and events at El Pueblo, visit: <http://elpueblo.lacity.org/>

To learn more about the LA Union Station Forecourt and Esplanade Improvements Project, visit: <https://www.metro.net/about/union-station/la-union-station-forecourt-and-esplanade/>