

Rios pursues improvement

Gonzales school trustee's maternal qualities shine through on board

By **NIKO KYRIAKOU**
For The Salinas Californian

More than anything else, Gonzales school board trustee Eva Rios' maternal qualities shine through.

Elected in November to her third term on the Gonzales Unified School District board, Rios is a mother of four and involved in more youth programs than one can count.

The 20-year Gonzales resident is a catechist, a part-time classroom aide, a GATE committee volunteer and a fund-raiser for athletic and extracurricular youth activities, such as this year's Holiday Bazaar, which was held at La Gloria School in Gonzales on Dec. 3.

As a trustee, Rios is responsible for creating and adopting policies for district schools, overseeing school budgets and approving courses of study.

She said motherhood has helped prepare her for her job on the five-member board. She calls children her inspiration.

"I bring a strong commitment. I have a very strong vested interest in this as a parent and a community member," Rios said. "The children are what inspire me. They are resilient. They're eager to learn. They're not afraid to take on new challenges, and when they are challenged, they rise to the occasion."

If she brings her maternal instincts to bear in her job on the school board, one might ask whether there is a correlation between how she mothers and how she works.

'Puts her heart in everything'

A longtime friend and former school board colleague, Lucy Basaldua, said that as a mother, Rios teaches tried-and-true virtues.

"Her belief is very old-fashioned in not providing your children with too much materialistic stuff, earning your keep, working to get money to buy things," Basaldua said. "That's



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Eva Rios recently won a third term on the Gonzales school board.

the type of mom she is."

As a board member, Basaldua said Rios is driven and compassionate.

"She puts her heart in everything," she said, "and that's what

really attracted me to her."

Between 2000 and 2001, when the two women sat together on the board, Basaldua remembers that Rios researched subjects diligently and went after her

EVA RIOS

n **AGE:** 41

n **POSITION:** Gonzales Unified School District Board Trustee.

n **JOB:** Part-time classroom aide at Chualar School in Chualar; volunteer work.

n **EDUCATION:** Gonzales High graduate, attended Hartnell College.

n **EXPERIENCE:** Mother, homemaker, catechist, long-time volunteer for school site councils and GATE committee; former volunteer for Head Start, Little League, senior citizens center, budget committee.

n **PERSONAL:** Lives in Gonzales with her husband of 20 years, Jose Rios; sons, ages 7, 14 and 16; and daughter, age 18.

goals like a "bull dog."

"Once she sets her mind to something she's determined to get her concerns across," Basaldua said.

Some people may think Rios is too aggressive, she said, adding that Rios "had some friends and enemies on the board."

Rios herself said people have called her a "very proactive board member" but said she "doesn't take that as an offense."

Supports art, music, sports

As a trustee, Rios said she has helped make an impact on one of the biggest problems facing the district, declining student enrollment.

Gonzales lost some 700 students when Soledad High School opened in 1999, an amount nearly equal to one-third of the district's total enrollment in 2004.

Art, music and athletic classes help the Gonzales district retain students, Rios said, adding that the majority of board members have been "very strong and very bold" in their support for maintaining and expanding these programs.

"When you have a music program such as the one we have, for many programs, that is the jewel of the high school," she said. "Also your athletics, kids enjoy it more if they know they have those programs after school. It keeps students here."

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