Martha "Mattie" Susan Lewis

Nomination submission by Norman Rozoff to the 2010 Rotary Club of Harlingen Walk of Fame:

1. Were it not for this woman, devoted to her vocation and the community, many in Cameron County would not be alive today. She was one of the pioneers of preventative medicine in the area when knowledge and service were sadly lacking. As a memorial article stated "There have been many who have contributed their share of time and effort to the growth of Harlingen over the years, but one of the most active women must have been Mrs. J. C. Lewis, who died on December 27, 1974 at age 89 years."

Born in Virginia she received a degree in public health from the University of Virginia. No sooner had she received this degree than she went directly into the mountains to help care for the people stricken in an epidemic of diphtheria. She came to Corpus Christi, Texas as a Red Cross nurse to help the area in the aftermath of a hurricane.

It was to be in deep South Texas that she would make her mark, for she was to become the region's first public health nurse. In 1933 she would join the Cameron County Health Unit in Brownsville. More than three decades of service would follow. The challenges were great because general health conditions in the area were poor; infant mortality rates were very high. Although she gave credit to others, both physicians and organizations, it was she who changed conditions for the better and was the moving force in helping to turn conditions around. She succeeded because she had a special feeling for working with people and generating a cooperative spirit.

2. & 3. Mrs. Lewis and her farmer husband lived on Wilson Road. She would be widowed in 1938 and later move into the city. It was on 11/23/55 that the Kiwanis named public health nurse, Mrs. J.C. (Martha Susan) Lewis, as "Harlingen Woman of the Year." She had started nursing here in 1935 and after 1940 spent much time at the Well Baby Clinic. This was a facility established at Fair Park, now Lon C. Hill Park. It was established in cooperation with the Child Guidance Club that later evolved into the Nine-Thirty Study Club. Her tenure had since seen a sharp drop in infant mortality figures. In 1976 the Nine Thirty Club of Harlingen, Texas, recognized her with a photographic portrait hung in the Cameron County Clinic near Lon C. Hill Pool. This was the Well Baby Clinic Building. She is noted as "Pioneer Health Service Nurse Humanitarian and Founder of the Well Baby Clinic." Upon Mrs. Lewis' death the club set up a special memorial fund in her name.

4. Who can put a price tag or statistically state how many youngsters were allowed to grow into adulthood due to Mrs. Lewis' efforts. We do know that she touched countless lives and homes. That is recognition enough.