



Joseph F. Cortez

September 23, 1931 - October 8, 2025

San Antonio basketball legend “Papa” Joe Cortez died on October 8, 2025 at the age of 94.

He was born in San Antonio on September 24, 1931 to Jose M. Cortez and Eva Fernandez Cortez. His father died when Joe was only three years old, and his mother later married John Patiño. Johnny played a major role in Joe’s upbringing, as did his Cortez uncles and his grandmother Monica Fernandez, who Joe credited with giving him his strong foundation in faith.

A major turning point in his life was when a school friend, Allen “Buddy” Schultze, convinced him to register at Central Catholic for seventh grade. While at Central, he played on teams that won two TCIL State basketball titles, and was an all-city and all-state honoree. He graduated from Central in 1950, and credits the school and the Marianists for shaping who he would become and setting him on his life’s path.

Joe said that one of the things he was most proud of was never having missed a day of school or morning mass and Communion during his six years at Central.

He attended the University of Texas on a four-year basketball scholarship, and was the first Hispanic player on the UT basketball team. He finished his B.A. at St. Mary’s University.

“Central Catholic High School taught me who I was. The University of Texas taught me what I could be. St. Mary’s University taught me what I should be... a man of God.”

In 1956 he married the love of his life, Maria Teresa Flores. Joe and Terry built a beautiful life and raised four children together. Joe often reflected that his was a life of miracles, the greatest of which was being married to Terry.

In the early years of their marriage, he began teaching and coaching at Peacock Military Academy while commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, then Captain, in the Army Reserves.

In 1959, he received a call from Brother Andrew Cremer offering him a position at Central Catholic, where he became one of the school's first lay teachers, and embarked on what would become the most fulfilling years of his career.

A statement released by Central reads: "He didn't just coach basketball— he coached life. Coach Cortez's legacy extends far beyond his 36 years on the basketball court at Central Catholic. A teacher, mentor, and father figure to countless young men, he embodied what it means to be a Brother of Central Catholic."

While at Central, he became the winningest basketball coach in San Antonio history, leading the Buttons to 10 TCIL Championships. He also coached championship winning football and baseball teams and was a beloved history teacher.

Having summers off during the academic years allowed Joe to take his passion for basketball in new and exciting directions. A chance encounter led to one last run as a player, when he toured with the Harlem Globetrotters as a member of their opposition team during the 1965 European and Middle Eastern tour. In 1974, he helped develop the Spurs Basketball youth camps, and continued to run the program for several summers.

After retirement from Central, he coached at Trinity University and in the Mexico Professional League.

He was inducted into the San Antonio Sports Hall of Fame and the Latin American International Sports Hall of Fame.

Joe was passionate about his work with the Hispanic Sports Foundation for Education, which he was instrumental in founding. HSFE provides mentorship

and scholarships to first-generation college-bound students from the San Antonio area.

The greatest source of pride in Joe's life was his family. He was happiest when he and Terry hosted the whole family during holidays and other celebrations, leading everyone in prayer and imparting wisdom, emphasizing the importance of sacrifice and community. His family will always remember him for his bear hugs, infectious laugh, and relentless optimism.

He was preceded in death by his devoted wife of 68 years, Terry, and his eldest son, Charles Joseph. He is survived by his daughter, Laura Mendez and son-in-law Joe, his sons John Daniel Cortez and Andrew Cortez, eleven grandchildren, and ten great-grandchildren.

A Rosary will be held on October 30 at 6:00 P.M. at the Coach Joe Cortez '50 Court in the Kahlig Cowie Convocation Center at Central Catholic High School. The funeral Mass will be held on October 31 at 10:00 A.M. at Holy Spirit Catholic Church.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Central Catholic High School for the Coach Joe Cortez '50 Scholarship or to the Hispanic Sports Foundation for Education.

Previous Events

Rosary

OCT 30. 6:00 PM (CT)

Central Catholic High School
1403 N St Marys St
San Antonio, TX 78230

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Mass of Resurrection

OCT 31. 10:00 AM (CT)

Holy Spirit Catholic Church
8134 Blanco Rd
San Antonio, TX 78216-3412
(210) 341-1395

Graveside Service

OCT 31. 3:00 PM (CT)

Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery
17501 Nacogdoches Rd
San Antonio, TX 78266

Tribute Wall

MA

“ *Fun guy!!*

Mary - January 05 at 11:45 AM

JK

“ *Thanks Coach Cortez for your outstanding and faithful service to the Marianist family. Rest in peace.*

John Knoebel - October 30, 2025 at 11:53 AM

AW

“ *Arthur W. purchased the Sentiments of Serenity Spray for the family of Joseph F. Cortez.*



Arthur W. - October 30, 2025 at 11:40 AM

GM

“ *Ginni Minchew purchased the Arrive in Style for the family of Joseph F. Cortez.*



Ginni Minchew - October 27, 2025 at 05:42 PM

DK

“ Daniel & Denise Kellum purchased the Divine Light for the family of Joseph F. Cortez.



Daniel & Denise Kellum - October 27, 2025 at 02:49 PM

TJ

“ The Castillos-Joe, Monica, Joey & Cristina purchased the Loving Lilies and Roses Bouquet for the family of Joseph F. Cortez.



The Castillos-Joe, Monica, Joey & Cristina - October 27, 2025 at 02:03 PM

ED

“ Coach Cortez was the embodiment of Central Catholic HS. I remember his teachings and his structure to bring the best you could be and the man you would go to be once graduating. Wonderful and Caring completely. May you rest in peace and continue coaching in the heavens, Coach Cortez

Eduardo Alcantar '80

eduardo - October 26, 2025 at 02:02 AM

BE

“ Joe, Thank you for everything you did for Central Catholic and for all the young men that you influenced over all the years of your coaching and mentoring.

Your legacy will live on through what all of these men accomplish in their lifetimes.

May you and Terry now spend eternity together.

Bob Elizondo '62

Bob Elizondo - October 23, 2025 at 07:58 PM

D'

“ I am profoundly grateful for being blessed with Coach's highly positive presence in my life while at Central Catholic High School and for many years thereafter. He was a wonderful role model in all respects, and the purity of his goodness was brightly manifested by his admirable, inspiring, and enduring example of excellence as a teacher, coach, leader, citizen, man of faith, family patriarch, and friend. His wonderful legacy of faith-based achievement will be a proud and lasting testament to himself, his family, and to CCHS. I offer my condolences to Coach's family and my prayers for their comfort in this difficult time.

Douglas Piper, CCHS '66 - October 23, 2025 at 03:57 PM

NG

“ Nufy and Francine Garza-Vale purchased the Fair rest of All for the family of Joseph F. Cortez.



Nufy and Francine Garza-Vale - October 23, 2025 at 01:43 PM

PK

“ Uncle Joe was an awesome guy and a great uncle. He gave great bear hugs. Aunt Eva was my favorite aunt and we hung around allot when I was young. His son lost a finger one day when we were swinging and I picked it up. He took his son to hospital and they sewed it back on. Gonna miss u Uncle Joe.

Patricia Kabel - October 21, 2025 at 10:54 AM

AG

“ My sincere condolences to the Cortez family. We have truly lost a mentor that touched our lives in many ways. He was my history teacher my senior year, 1970, and he always made his class special in is own way. He attended several get togethers with our Class of '70 and always received a standing ovation, so well deserved. He made our activities special with his inspirational speeches advising us to cherish our blessings and to love one another. He always spoke from his heart, pronouncing his love for us and Central. I will miss his presence. May God Bless Coach and his family and may he have eternal peace. Sincerely, Albert de la Garza '70

Albert De La Garza - October 20, 2025 at 11:45 PM



“ Fiery Lily and Rose was purchased for the family of Joseph F. Cortez.



October 18, 2025 at 04:27 PM

SF

“ *Sertich Family purchased the Sentiments of Serenity Spray for the family of Joseph F. Cortez.*



Sertich Family - October 18, 2025 at 12:15 PM

AC

“ *Coach, I had the pleasure of officiating several of your basketball games with Central Catholic. You were always a class act and your teams reflected your dedication to the game of basketball. You were a great coach and you made me a better official. Eternal rest to your soul! Condolences to the family.*

Al Curiel - October 17, 2025 at 08:45 PM

GA

“ *Coach, I've never known anyone who had a greater faith in God than you--not even my saintly mother! Pray for us now that you're up there with Him. And tell my mother hi from her hijito.*

Gilbert G. Arias - October 17, 2025 at 12:29 PM

LH

“ *Joe, sure did enjoy all our time together when I was part of the Military Staff at Central Catholic and years following. RIP my friend and you will be greatly missed. One way to describe Joe, one great and wonderful individual.*

Larry Haven - October 17, 2025 at 08:51 AM

AC

“ Joe was a fantastic individual! He overcame many obstacles during his journey of faith, love, and caring. He honored and praised God, love his family, friends, and the Central community, and cared for his fellow human beings no matter who they were. He was always there to teach, motivate, and support anyone who came into his life! Our most sincere condolences to the family. May he rest in peace in God's hands!

Al & Betty Cervera - October 17, 2025 at 12:18 AM

M'

“ Thank you for everything, Coach. I appreciate everything you taught me.

Mike Saucedo - CCHS '86 - October 15, 2025 at 10:00 PM