

Who's the man behind the curtain?

Wayne Thornton, Guest columnist 9:16 p.m. MST January 13, 2016

Most people who attend events at the University of Texas at El Paso in the past two decades have probably seen an unassuming man, either behind a public address system or standing outside guarding a tour bus.

He goes about his various jobs quietly, only speaking when needed.

Let me introduce you to Fernie



Mabini, UTEP's behind-the-scenes man.

There are many "faces of UTEP," such as President Diana Natalicio or Bob Stull, the director of athletics, football coach Sean Kugler and the basketball coaches Tim Floyd and Keitha Adams.

Fernie Mabini does it all at UTEP to prepare different facilities for special events. (Photo: Courtesy)

But, if you deal with any UTEP events, whether athletics, music or dance, you have probably dealt with Mabini, a gentleman who is just as accomplished and well-known as those mentioned above.

I have known him for more than 40 years ago. He remains as witty, caring and resourceful as when I met him in the 1970s.

Even back then, he could be found at Memorial Gym, the old Special Events Center (now the Don Haskins Center), Magoffin Auditorium or Sun Bowl Stadium.

Mabini's illustrious career at UTEP started in special events in 1974, where he still works 42 years later, now as the technical manager, in the Office of Special Events at the university.

He works alongside "Mr. Efficiency," Jorge Vasquez, the executive director of the department, along with longtime employee

Mike Spence, the director of special events management and the high-energy assistant director Ricky Nichols.

Mabini has a historical history of UTEP that is second to none. He has seen almost every major event the university offered in four decades. The proud Irvin High School graduate was a valuable friend to the UTEP women's basketball team in the program's early years of existence in the 1970s.

"Having known Fernie for over 30 years, I appreciate his remarkable memory and vast historical perspective of the campus and events held here," Spence said. "He has a wide and varied knowledge of events, especially in technical areas, which we rely on for the many productions held on campus."

You could hardly tell Mabini had open heart surgery two years ago as he continues to be at the top of his game, while remaining kind and gentle.

After the hundreds of concerts and countless football and basketball games he has seen, you would wonder what his most memorable event has been.

Without hesitation, he mentioned the viewing of Hall of Fame coach Don Haskins at the center named in his honor after his passing several years ago. Thousands of fans walked through the Haskins Center to pay respects to Coach, a man who was more than a sports icon.

The next time you attend a UTEP function, look around and you'll a quiet guy with long hair and a genuine smile, working in the background — that's Fernie Mabini.

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