

AVILA, MARÍA ELENA (1953–)

“I saw my mom as a partner in the business; I had her as a role model.” Maria Elena Avila. *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*.

Born in Guanajuato, Mexico, María Elena Avila has become one of the most successful entrepreneurs in Orange County, California. She and her siblings own and operate the popular Avila's El Ranchito restaurants, with ten locations in southern California. The Avilas put down roots in Huntington Park, California, and there in 1966 her parents, borrowing pots and pans, opened their first restaurant. In 1974 María Elena started her own restaurant, and although she was only twenty-one years old and a single mother, she was determined to succeed. Avila owns Avila's El Ranchito in Costa Mesa and the family's catering business. As the keeper of her mother's cherished recipes, she oversees the quality control at all of their restaurants. María Elena Avila is one of the area's most recognized Latina civic leaders, and has served as a founding member of the Orange County Hispanic Education Endowment Fund as well as the Latino Leadership Council. A devout Pentecostal, Avila credits her success to her Christian faith.

© Latinas in History 2008