

BETTY ARAGON-MITOTES

A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

Betty Aragon-Mitotes has become one of the most important voices for Hispanic people in Fort Collins, Colorado. She has advocated for improved housing, an end to discrimination, better job opportunities, and children, and has founded nonprofit organizations dedicated to improving their lives.

EARLY LIFE

Betty was born in Trinidad, Colorado, and moved to Fort Collins with her family as a child. She was raised in Buckingham — one of the city's Tres Colonias neighborhoods, which were historically home to Hispanic and Mexican families who came to the area to work its surrounding sugar beet fields. Early in life she often saw discrimination against her parents and other Hispanics and noted that the typical response was to ignore the insult. As an adult, she determined not to do the same but to become a voice for her people.

BEGINNING ADVOCACY

Betty helped rescue her neighborhood, Buckingham, from being overrun by drugs, gangs and violence. She sought to dignify and restore the Hispanic heritage in Fort Collins by honoring that history. Accordingly, she became a leader of the Buckingham Neighborhood Association and spoke on their behalf before the Fort Collins City Council.

THE MUSEO

Betty was a co-founder of the Museo de Las Tres Colonias, a museum in Buckingham which exhibits life as it existed for Hispanics who came to live here and work in the sugar beet industry in the early 20th century. Some worked in the factory, others in the fields—including small children. The Romero home which became the museo is an adobe house, one of only a few remaining, with no indoor plumbing. It is free and open to visitors on the third Saturday of every month. Cultural programs showcase Hispanic history and culture.

HELP FOR HER PEOPLE

In 1999 she helped organize a petition drive to prevent a truck route that would have negatively impacted the other two small Hispanic neighborhoods near Buckingham, Alta Vista and Andersonville. Thanks to the petition, the issue was placed on the ballot and passed. She also organized a drive to get a measure on the ballot allowing a Walmart near the neighborhoods, providing residents with ready access to lower-cost goods. Voters also passed that initiative.

Betty started a program to ensure that every school child who needed one began the school year with a backpack full of supplies. She founded Mujeres de Colores, an

organization for Hispanic women, and every year before Christmas she helps coordinate a posada, during which the children of the community come to the Museo to visit with Santa Claus and receive a gift. Families also receive food baskets. Periodic neighborhood clean-ups have also been part of her volunteer involvements.

DOCUMENTARIES

Betty has produced two documentaries putting before the people of Fort Collins issues of discrimination that Hispanics continue to face. The first film, “Fort Collins: The Choice City for Whom?,” addresses discrimination for all people of color, not only Hispanics, presenting historic and contemporary instances of mistreatment in this city. The newer film, “2020 Hispanic Community Voices: The Impact of Covid 19,” focuses directly on how the 2020-21 pandemic has affected people of color, particularly in low-income brackets. It features several interviews with individuals who have been impacted and includes music scored by David Wiatroluk.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Lincoln Corridor Stake Holders Committee, Northside Committee, Neighborhood Clean-up

AWARDS

SOL Award from the Latino Foundation
Chosen as a Colorado Woman of Influence
Honoree of Living Her Legacy, an art/education nonprofit in Fort Collins
Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award

HER LEGACY

Betty is a dedicated leader and supporter of social justice in our community. She strives to create and preserve the historical contributions of early Hispanic pioneers. A tireless advocate for the Hispanic community, she is co-founder of the Museo de las Tres Colonias.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why is discrimination wrong?
2. What can be done to prevent it?
3. How should you respond to it, if it happens to you?

TIMELINE

1999—petition drive to reroute trucks away from the three colonies
2000—Walmart petition and ballot initiative
2001—founding of the museo
2009-13—neighborhood clean-ups
2009-16—neighborhood night out
2012—Betty’s Backpack Program
2015— “Choice City for Whom?” film

2016—founding of Mujeres de Colores

2016—Make a Difference Day

2021— “Hispanic Community Voices” film

2021—advocacy and fund-raising for a monument to sugar beet workers in Sugar Beet Park

GLOSSARY

Discrimination—denying people rights or access solely because of who they are

Documentary—a film that tells a story about real people’s lives

Heritage—what those who came before us leave behind

Hispanic –one word for people whose origins or current residences are Cuban, Mexican, Central or South American, or any other Spanish-speaking country

Pandemic—a widespread epidemic of a highly infectious disease

Petition—a collection of signatures supporting a request, most often to the government, sometimes to other organizations

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