

Partnering to meet the needs of community

Head of La Casa de Esperanza credits public-private collaboration for success

By Dave Fidlin Special to The Freeman

WAUKESHA – Forty-five years ago, a local organization was formed with a simple mission that has yielded far-reaching results.

La Casa de Esperanza has been working with Waukesha's Hispanic population over the years in an effort to ensure people have the necessary skills to enjoy the full quality of life American society has to offer.

In the midst of Hispanic Heritage Month, The Freeman recently sat down with Anselmo Villarreal, executive director of La Casa de Esperanza, to discuss the organization's past, present and future.

Villarreal has been with La Casa de Esperanza 25 years and has spent 18 of them in a leadership role. He describes his quartercentury with the organization as "a great blessing" and credits successes over the years to strong public/private partnerships throughout the community.

FREEMAN: From your perspective, how quickly has the Hispanic population grown in Waukesha?

VILLARREAL: It's been growing at a significant rate. The U.S. Census data proves this.

FREEMAN: How does La Casa de Esperanza meet the community's needs?

VILLARREAL: Our message is to provide services to anyone in need – and that includes the non-Hispanic population. Nevertheless, our emphasis remains on the Hispanic population. We put a special emphasis on education and jobs through our Workforce Development Program. It's extremely important that our community is an educated community. We also provide technical assistance and offer clinical and behavioral services. We want everyone to be great assets to the community. Because the city of Waukesha has more diversification, we work mostly with people in this community. But we have a strong presence throughout Waukesha County.

FREEMAN: How has the Hispanic population changed over the years in Waukesha?

VILLARREAL: One of the great things about Waukesha is the community itself is very welcoming. That attitude has helped create a fully integrated population for the community at large. But the Hispanic population itself still has some significant struggles, particularly when it comes to education.

FREEMAN: Looking ahead, do you foresee any challenges?

VILLARREAL: As the Hispanic population continues to grow, our goal is to help people be prepared so they have the necessary skills to excel in today's economy. That means getting educated, which we try to advocate all the time.

FREEMAN: What have been some of the organization's successes or triumphs in recent memory?

VILLARREAL: The Hispanic population has had many successes, and La Casa de Esperanza has as well. As an organization, we are constantly expressing gratitude to the community for all their support, and that includes the health care and manufacturing industries. In recent years, La Casa has been able to expand. Apartments have been built, and so have facilities to help support and train people. All of the successes are because of the participation from the greater business community.

FREEMAN: Why do you believe La Casa de Esperanza has enjoyed the success it has here in Waukesha?

VILLARREAL: We began in 1966 with a goal of helping Spanish speakers make a smooth transition into the greater community. La Casa de Esperanza was created to provide a bridge for people and our community and our school district. The goal was to equip the Hispanic population to understand the language and culture in the community as a whole. Over the years, the partnerships have been phenomenal. We've worked with Waukesha Memorial Hospital, WCTC (Waukesha County Technical College), UW Waukesha, Carroll University – you name it. Between the public sector and all levels of government, there has been tremendous support, and that's what's made this organization a success.