

It is with a heavy heart that I have had to make a difficult decision to retire out of the Museo. My circumstances have changed, in the last few months my engine went out on my car and I had to get another which will require me to work full time. My schedule will not be as flexible as it has been in the past. It has been an honor and a privilege to have been with the Museo from the beginning back in 2000, and one of the founders. The Museo has been a strong cultural museum in our community, one that has had many visitors over the years. Visitor's from the community, other states and cities. I have given tours from elementary schools to universities, to different organizations and folks that have come to the open house. The common thread I have always heard was how wonderful it is to have a cultural museum that honors the Hispanics in our community. The Museo was a dream that became a reality, how proud I am to have been a part of sharing history of the early Hispanic pioneers that came to Fort Collins. Many recruited by Great Western Sugar factory to work in the beet fields and the factory. Many came from Southern Colorado, New Mexico and Mexico. These people helped to weave the very fabric of our history.

Our cultural events drew many people from all walks of life, that was our mission to help bridge the gap and to have a respectful understanding of what we all contribute to the city. What I heard from the community early on was that Hispanics have been overlooked for way to long, so this has been a tribute to all the people that worked the fields, who stood tall even when the signs downtown said "White Trade Only," "No Mexican, No Dogs." We continue to fight discrimination today.

The Museo stood for giving back to the community, through oral histories from community members and to honor the many families including the Romero family since this was their home. We gave back through the backpack program and took a strong stance on the importance of education. We partnered with Barbara Slattenow, Ernestine Munsey and members of the AAUW, American Association of University Women to sponsor many young women from local schools to attend the International Cultural Leadership Workshop.

What I am most proud of is all the partnerships from the business community, and community at large that saw the importance of the Museo and helped to donate funds and toys for the events and for others their time and energy.

Over the last couple of years I have been filled with disappointments, from the City not meeting the needs of the Museo, to the liaison to the City who sits on our board. The biggest disappointment came in recent months, with a new board I felt excited about the possibilities, but in Nov and Dec. I was confronted with controversy. Posadas gift and food distribution has always been about families and the children. This year there was some folks that sat on the board that wanted to make it political. It has NEVER been that. The Museo has always welcomed donations from all that wanted to help; it became an issue when Pete Turner of Illegal Pete's offered to help again this year. He helped last year, we were grateful, and it was not an issue. He has wanted to help in the Hispanic community, and this is not a means to exploit anyone. He saw the need and saw firsthand the folks in the community we service. Some new members on the board did not want us to take the donation, for some of us this was not political it was about the kids. I understand for many this is an issue, the name seems to offend people but I was at that initial meeting, I heard him explain how he got the name. I don't believe in my heart that he has ill will against anyone. I have been told "Words" are important here. The word "Illegal Pete's" here is not used in an offensive manner; words that matter to me are people using the "N" word against African-Americans, or Spic, or racial slurs against other races. I have spent time talking with other Hispanics and folks in the immigrant community that agree that we have bigger issues to fight and this is not one of them. We have needed help with fighting development and gentrification, where has this group been to help us in the community? I explained to people that came for Posadas about the controversy and made clear who our sponsors and partners were, so if they had issue they didn't have to take the gifts. Not one person left. The conversation on the board about this issue was heartbreaking and extremely stressful for me, and relationships were strained. I stand in my truth and doing right by people! I always have and always will fight for the rights of the poor and Hispanics.

We have had to deal with graffiti and vandalism at the Museo as well; kids have carved in to the adobe, and continue to kick out the pickets on the fence on a regular basis. Most recently they tried to set the port a pottie on fire.

The Museo was purchased by Mark Goldberg, that this house would interpret Hispanic history. For his generosity, I am forever grateful! So my hope is that the Museo will be taken to the next level, it will continue to flourish and continue to honor the Hispanics of our past history, of our present and our future. I leave knowing that I have given the very best of my ability to make this Museo a place of pride. It is my hope that someone from the Hispanic community will take the lead now and continue to love it as much as I have.

Gracias,

Betty Aragon-Mitotes