



IN HISTORY: IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC HERITAGE

Community

Meet Dr. Jose Arrendondo

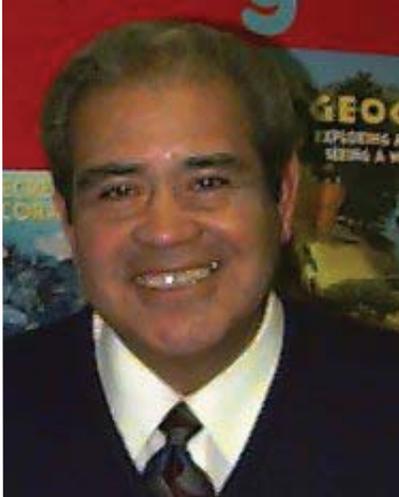


Photo: Traditional Arts Indiana

Dr. Arredondo teaches with the education department at Valparaiso University in northern Indiana. A former Assistant Superintendent of Schools in East Chicago and State Representative, he founded the Ballet Folklórico and performance group, Mariachi Acero, a semi-professional performance ensemble for Hispanic youth.

Born in East Chicago, his parents were originally from Mexico. They moved to the Calumet region like so many others to raise their family. His father, Miguel Arredondo, worked as a laborer in the steel mills.

From a conversation with the Traditional Arts Indiana program (Indiana University, Bloomington):

When I was five, I started school in East Chicago, the town where I was born and raised, with absolutely no English speaking ability. Spanish was my home language as a youngster. From this life experience, from my neighborhood, from my work at Calumet College and as an Assistant Superintendent with the schools in that area, the needs of Latin [Hispanic] children became clear to me. Some of these students—their families come from Texas, or California or Mexico; some from Chicago. They are my inspiration, their success is my vision.

Bilingual education isn't a neutral issue. Like I've said before, discussions about bilingual education are likely to elevate blood pressures. But a lot of the emotion obscures the real issues. Education—an appropriate education—that's key to success for Latin [Hispanic] students.

I started Mariachi Acero and the Ballet Folklórico as a way to develop self-esteem with these youngsters. They need to value their music, their language, their dances, they need to feel good about themselves and their culture and heritage, and all it stands for. I organized the Ballet in 1984; we started with six young girls practicing twice a week.

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It's still going! Hundreds of young women have taken part. And so many of these students have gone on the honor rolls in high school; many have gone on to college. It's a way of gaining self-confidence, self-discipline and a sense of accomplishment as well as pride in who you are and where you are from. There's been a lot of dedication and a lot of love—that's why we've succeeded.

In 1970 there were 9 million Hispanics in the U. S.; by 1990, there were 22.4 million. Hispanics in this century are expected to be more than ten percent of all Americans! We're becoming ten percent of the labor force. But education is the key. We need sound educational planning, and schools that are prepared to innovate, to implement appropriate educational experiences for Spanish-speaking students, for all students.