



By Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

Print Page

October 20, 2016 10:34AM

## Post celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month

“Embracing, Enriching and Enabling America” was the theme for this year’s Hispanic Heritage Month luncheon.

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Capt. Carolina Cruz, an Adjutant General Corps officer and student currently in the Command and General Staff Officer Course, served as the guest speaker for the 2016 Hispanic Heritage Month luncheon on Oct. 13 at the Frontier Conference Center. “Embracing, Enriching and Enabling America” was the theme.

Cruz is a native of Cartago, Valle del Cauca, Colombia. Her keynote address focused on her journey as an immigrant and key people who influenced her military career.

“I am representative of those Hispanic immigrants who will always be thankful for the opportunity to live their ‘American Dream,’” Cruz said. “My story exemplifies the challenges faced, and victories won, by some Hispanics during their individual journeys in America.”

In his 2016 proclamation of Hispanic Heritage Month, President Barack Obama wrote, “Last year, Hispanic Americans saw the largest gains of any racial or ethnic group in median income and experienced among the greatest reductions in poverty.”

In her speech, Cruz referenced that statement while emphasizing how the Hispanic community is contributing to such things as the nation’s economy.

“I am proud of both my Colombian heritage and my U.S. citizenship,” Cruz said. “I have been exposed to the true meaning of hard work, perseverance and selfless service from a very young age. I am privileged to be an American soldier and wear the uniform that honors our past, present and future. Observances like today show a positive side of the Hispanic culture.”

Cruz told some of her family history and how, while still living in Colombia, her father held two jobs. Despite this determined work ethic, the cost of living made it difficult for her father to support the family financially. Her father subsequently immigrated to the United States, found employment and six years later was able to immigrate the entire family.

“I was acquainted with the sacrifices that come from family separation,” Cruz said. “When my classmates (in Colombia) used to ask where my dad was, I remember answering proudly, ‘Mi papa vive en los Estados Unidos’ – ‘My dad lives in the USA.’ My dad used to mail us clothes, school supplies, Barbie (dolls), among other things.”

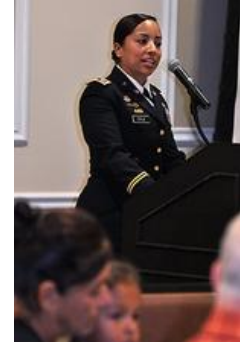
Cruz, who entered the Army as a private, rose through the enlisted ranks before being selected to attend Officer Candidate School. She culminated her speech by correlating aspects of her military career with the elements of the 2016 Hispanic Heritage Month theme.

“The theme for this year’s observance is ‘Embracing, Enriching, and Enabling’ — three words that lead to powerful results,” she said. “I thought of talking about some of the famous Hispanics who have had the greatest impact in our military. However, I decided to take a different approach.”

Each year, the United States observes National Hispanic Heritage Month from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 by celebrating the histories, cultures and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America.

The observation started in 1968 as Hispanic Heritage Week under President Lyndon Johnson and was expanded by President Ronald Reagan in 1988 to cover a 30-day period starting on Sept. 15 and ending on Oct. 15. Hispanic Heritage Month was enacted into law on Aug. 17, 1988, within Public Law 100-402.

The day of Sept. 15 is significant because it is the anniversary of independence for Latin American countries Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. In addition, Mexico and Chile celebrate their independence days on Sept. 16 and Sept. 18, respectively. Columbus Day, or Día de la Raza, which is Oct. 12, also falls within the month.



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Hispanic Heritage Month luncheon guest speaker Capt. Carolina Cruz, Command and General Staff Officer Course student who was born in Colombia, shares her family’s immigration story with Irma Lima, with her 2-year-old grandson Cayo Cook, and others gathered for the observance Oct. 13 at the Frontier Conference Center. Cruz talked about four Hispanic leaders who affected her career and said that she strives to provide the same level of mentorship to others that those four now-retired Army leaders provided her. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp