

Burnett, Christopher

Sep 27

to Bob, bcc: me

Bob: Here's my last story. Sincere thanks for everything.

I hope our paths cross again in the future. Take care, Cb

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Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

The Deputy Director, Executive Services, U. S. Army Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth, Gregorio Flores Jr., as the guest speaker for the 2017 Hispanic Heritage Month luncheon on Sept. 27 at the Frontier Conference Center. "Shaping a Brighter Future" was the theme.

"Bienvenidos – Welcome, Es un placer estar aqui - It is a pleasure to be here," Flores said. "I am a second generation Mexican-American, as my maternal grandparents were from Mexico."

Flores spoke about his family and said his father received his GED while serving in the Navy. He said his mother received her high school diploma but did not pursue college.

"Post-Secondary education was not something many Hispanics did at the time," Flores said. "I lost my father at the age of two during his service in the Vietnam War."

Flores said his mother and Spanish-speaking grandparents raised him. He said Spanish was his primary language until he started public school where he learned English.

"My wife, Betty and I are both originally from Texas, but we now call Leavenworth (Kan.) home," Flores said. "We have two boys, Greg and Gabriel."

Flores said his keynote highlighted some of the accomplishments, contributions and sacrifices made by Hispanics in the United States. He said many served with distinction as members of the military.

"The contributions Hispanics have made throughout the history of the (United States) have been exemplary," Flores said. "From the American Revolutionary War, with General Bernardo de Galvez ... To the Battle of the Alamo, in 1836 where several Mexicans took to fight for the U.S. after the Mexican government's treatment of Texans was appalling."

Flores said 10,000 Mexican-Americans volunteers fought in the regular army and volunteer units during the U.S. Civil War. He said of the more than 40,000 books and pamphlets written about the U.S. Civil War, only, "Vaqueros in Blue and Gray" by Jerry Thompson and Felix D. Almaraz, has been published about the role of Mexican-Americans in the Civil War.

"Hispanics continued to play a pivotal role during the Spanish American War, World War I and World War II too," Flores said. "Allow me to draw attention to World War II, focusing on Army Pvt. 1st Class Santiago H. Esparza, who was born in 1924."

Flores said Esparza was the oldest son of 14 children, an exemplary student and talented football player. He said the Army drafted Esparza at age 17.

"In January 1942, he left Texas to serve his country assigned to B Company, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, North Carolina," Flores said. "Pvt. 1st Class Esparza was part of the first Parachute Infantry Regiment mass combat jump into Sicily, Salerno, Normandy and Holland in support of Operation Market-Garden."

Flores shared excerpts from the original letters written to Esparza's mother by some of those who had served with him in combat during World War II. He said Esparza was his uncle who still serves as an excellent example of all Hispanic heritage.

"While growing up, my mother would always tell me that her oldest brother escaped from a prisoner-of-war camp in Emmerich, Germany," Flores said. "It never dawned on me ... My uncle was killed in action on December 23, 1944, and was never able to go back to the home he left at the age of 17."

Flores said the impact Hispanic soldiers have had upon the United States is significant. He said their legacy is motivational and positive.

"We are a diverse nation that welcomes everyone," Flores said. "Thus, the Army will have increasing opportunities to bring new ideas and expanded capabilities to the mission. We must be prepared to recruit, develop and retain the best of America's diverse talent pool."

Flores said Dr. John Chavez, the student advisor at Ashford University, wants Hispanics to imagine "shaping a brighter future" as deeply as they can. He said Chavez believes by doing this mental exercise everyone has the opportunity to make a positive difference in society.

"It means working hard and realizing the future is that difference," Flores said. "In all these examples I have set before you, that is what the Hispanic community has been doing."

Retired Maj. Gregorio Flores, Jr. is the deputy director of Executive Services. He graduated from Sam Houston State University and enlisted in the Army in 1996. After an Air Cavalry assignment, Flores commissioned as an Armor Officer in 1998 after completing Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Ga. His career assignments included both stateside and overseas tours of duty serving as a platoon leader, executive officer and aide-de-camp for the Deputy Commanding General of the United States Army in Europe.

Flores deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College. He began federal government service as a civilian in 2016.

Flores holds a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice from Sam Houston State University. He earned a Master of Arts in Management and Leadership from Webster University, and a Master of Science in Adult, Occupational and Continuing Education from Kansas State University.

Flores is married to the former Veronica Trevino, and they have two sons, Gregorio III, an Eagle Scout and a sophomore attending Baker University, and Gabriel, also an Eagle Scout and a senior attending Leavenworth High School.

The United States observes Hispanic Heritage Month from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 annually by celebrating the heritage, culture and contributions of Hispanic and Latino Americans to the United States.

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 next Equal Opportunity luncheon is Nov. 15 at Frontier Conference Center and will celebrate National American Indian Heritage Month.

Tickets are available from the Equal Opportunity office and unit Equal Opportunity Liaisons.

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