

# SANTUARIO EN EL PASEO BORICUA: RECORDANDO EL CASO DE ELVIRA ARELLANO Y LA SOLIDARIDAD BORICUA



• **SUCCESS STORIES OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS DEEPLY ROOTED IN THE COMMUNITY**

• **TRANSFORMING VON HUMBOLDT SCHOOL: A NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR TEACHERS IN HUMBOLDT PARK**

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**CENTRO INFANTIL CONSUELO LEE CORREJER CELEBRA 45 AÑOS P. 4 & 5**



**LA SANDWICHERA: A PUERTO RICAN FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESS HONORS A BELOVED COMMUNITY MEMBER'S LEGACY P. 12 & 13**





### ABOUT LA VOZ:

The most recent manifestation of Puerto Rican journalism in Chicago, La Voz del Paseo Boricua proudly continues in the legacy of our community's previous newspapers. Founded in 2004, La Voz del

Paseo Boricua, or simply 'La Voz' as it is affectionately called by our readers, is a grassroots bilingual periodical published by the Juan Antonio Corretjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center. We report on stories relevant to our community on a bimonthly basis, disseminating news about local events, programs, resources, and developments. As an alternative source of media, we seek to acknowledge the achievements of the Puerto Rican community at large and to advocate for the preservation of the heart of our barrio in Humboldt Park - our "pedacito de patria" in Chicago.

### SOBRE LA VOZ:

La más reciente manifestación del periodismo puertorriqueño en Chicago, La Voz del Paseo Boricua continúa orgullosamente el legado de nuestros primeros periódicos. Fundado en 2004, La Voz del Paseo Boricua, o 'La Voz' según se le conoce cariñosamente por nuestros lectores, es un periódico de pueblo, publicado de manera bilingüe por El Centro Cultural Puertorriqueño Juan Antonio Corretjer. Bimensualmente, divulga historias relevantes de nuestra comunidad, diseminando noticias sobre acontecimientos, programas, recursos, y progresos locales. Como fuente alternativa de medios, intentamos reconocer los logros de la comunidad puertorriqueña al igual que abogar por la preservación del corazón de nuestro barrio Humboldt Park - nuestro "pedacito de patria" en Chicago.



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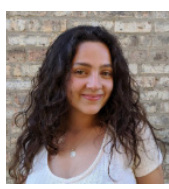


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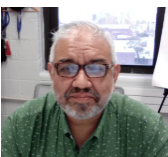
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## Transforming Von Humboldt School: A New Vision for Affordable Housing in Humboldt Park with a focus on our community's teachers and school workers



Mayor Brandon Johnson and Alderman Jessie Fuentes at Von Humboldt School.

Credit: Juanita García

By Alderperson Jessie Fuentes

Last week, the 26th Ward had the honor of hosting Mayor Brandon Johnson for a "Day in the Ward", where we toured the former Von Humboldt Elementary School — a school closed under the Rahm Emanuel administration. For years, this building stood vacant as a symbol of disinvestment in our community.

Today, we are reclaiming that space and transforming it into something powerful: a Teachers Village, an innova-

tive, affordable housing project designed to serve the educators and families of Humboldt Park.

Teachers Village is more than just an affordable housing development, it's a commitment to upholding and supporting our educators and essential school staff in the communities they serve. The cost of living in Humboldt Park continues to rise, forcing many educators — teachers, clerks, and school staff — to commute from outside the neighborhood because they cannot afford mar-

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ket-rate housing or rent here. This project will change that reality by offering high-quality rental housing that ensures our educators can live where they work, learn, and contribute to our community.

Beyond housing, this project will serve as an educational hub featuring a Parent University, a youth development center, and an Extended Learning program for educators. This means teachers and administrative

staff can maintain and earn new certifications to advance their careers, and local youth will have a place where they can develop new skills outside of school hours. By encouraging educators to become part of our community, we strengthen our schools and ensure that those teaching our children understand the lived experiences of their students firsthand.



*Credit: Juanita García*

## Winter Gear Giveaway Brings Warmth to the Community

*By Jacob Díaz*

The Violence Prevention Program hosted a heartwarming event, the Winter Gear Giveaway, on Jan 16th. Held at the PRCC Boxing Gym, located at 2619 W Division St, the initiative aimed to ensure families in need were prepared for the harsh winter months. Thanks to a successful clothing drive and generous community support, attendees were able to pick out essential winter gear for free, including coats, hats, gloves, and scarves. Multiple families from the local area attended the event,

embracing the opportunity to equip themselves and their loved ones for the season ahead. The atmosphere was filled with gratitude and camaraderie, highlighting the importance of community-led efforts in making a difference. The Violence Prevention Program continues to champion initiatives like this to foster safety, unity, and support for Chicago's families.



*Winter supplies are being handout during the Winter Gear Giveaway.*

*Credit: Cristian Rodrigues & Brandon Acevedo*

## Centro Infantil Consuelo Lee Corretjer Celebra 45 Años de una Excelente Muestra de Educación Preescolar Enfocada en la Lengua y la Cultura

By *Alonso Vidal*

A media tarde, pequeñas voces recorren las calles de Humboldt Park. Cada una intenta recordar la letra de la canción en español del día.

En fila, protegidos por los árboles, los alumnos del Consuelo Lee Corretjer Day Care Center toman un paseo mientras son guiados por sus profesoras, quienes orquestan los cantos.

El Consuelo Lee Corretjer Day Care Center es un centro infantil bilingüe ubicado en el Barrio Borikén que recibe estudiantes de entre 15 meses y 5 años.

Durante el camino, las banderas de acero del Paseo Boricua llaman la atención de los más pequeños.

“Esa es la bandera de Puerto Rico. Ese soy yo”, dice Xóchitl Ramírez, directora del Consuelo Lee Corretjer Day Care Center, sobre lo que se les puede escuchar decir a algunos de sus alumnos.

El programa de doble lenguaje que el Centro Infantil les brinda a sus alumnos no solo les enseña o refuerza el idioma, sino que también construye, desde una edad muy temprana, su identidad cultural. “Ya saben ‘que sí soy de Puerto Rico’ o ‘que sí soy de México’”, remarcó Ramírez.



*Xóchitl Ramírez detrás de sus estudiantes en el Centro Infantil.*

*Credit: PRCCCIC archives.*

El centro fue nombrado en honor a la educadora y poeta puertorriqueña Consuelo Lee Corretjer, quien, junto a su esposo, Juan Antonio Corretjer, luchó por mantener la cultura e identidad puertorriqueña en las escuelas.

Este 29 de marzo, el Centro Infantil celebra sus 45 años, mientras Ramírez cumplirá 40 años trabajando en la institución.

Ramírez recordó que acababa de llegar de México cuando su madre, Irma Romero, una de las fundadoras del Centro Infantil, le dijo que necesitaban voluntarios.

Así fue como Ramírez

comenzó como voluntaria en septiembre de 1985. Dos años después, le ofrecieron una posición a tiempo parcial como maestra.

Ramírez dijo que en ese entonces nunca pensó en ser educadora y mucho menos en quedarse todos esos años en el Centro Infantil.

La necesidad de un centro de cuidado infantil bilingüe donde se hablara español en la comunidad, llevó a las fundadoras a abrir el Centro Infantil en un sótano en West Town, recordó Ramírez.

Con los años, fueron cambiando de locación para responder a las necesidades del número creciente

de alumnos, que pasó de cinco al ser fundado hasta los 62 que hoy estudian en la locación actual en Humboldt Park.

“Te das cuenta de que los años han pasado”, dijo Ramírez, quien alguna vez tuvo a sus hijos y nietos como alumnos. Los que alguna vez fueron niños ahora son jóvenes y adultos, añadió.

Cecilia Calderón, la subdirectora asociada del Centro Infantil, hace 20 años fue una de esas alumnas.

Calderón dijo que el plan de estudios del Centro Infantil es principalmente en español, por lo que es esencial para las familias que solamente manejan este idioma. Sin embargo, en el presente, muchas familias buscan sus servicios porque quieren que sus niños aprendan español.

“No es difícil para ellos [los alumnos que solo hablan inglés] adaptarse porque desde que abren la puerta, el saludo es en español”, dijo Ramírez.

“Hay muchos niños que llegan aquí y no saben que son puertorriqueños, que son mexicanos, porque no les han enseñado eso”,

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Xóchitl Ramírez juega con unos alumnos del Centro Infantil

dijo María Bezares, subdirectora y maestra en el Centro Infantil, también conocida como “Coqui”.

Bezares, quien este año cumplirá 30 años trabajando en el Centro Infantil, dijo que siempre tuvo el deseo de enseñar.

Ella comenzó como maestra después de encontrar

el Centro Infantil gracias a su esposo, el hermano de Ramírez.

El currículo de doble lenguaje del Centro Infantil cubre desde la alfabetización hasta los estudios sociales, priorizando la enseñanza de la cultura puertorriqueña y mexicana. Sin embargo, debido a que

sus alumnos varían en nacionalidades, también se estudian otras culturas latinoamericanas.

Ramírez agregó que, muchas veces, los padres de familia les prestan artículos culturales de su país de origen para así poder enseñarle a los niños acerca de Latinoamérica.

Ramírez dijo que cree que el programa de doble lenguaje es necesario para que sus estudiantes aprendan sobre sus raíces. Aunque nunca hayan ido a su país de origen, aquí pueden aprender algo relacionado con su cultura, afirmó ella.

## Humboldt Park HIV Prevention Program Establishes Fantasy Nightclub Residency for 2025

By Christopher Concepción

The Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) continues strengthening its connections with the LGBTQ community. PRCC has launched a new outreach initiative at Fantasy Night Club, providing essential public health services directly to our community, particularly to the Latinx and Black population of the LGBT+ Community.

On January 26, PRCC began offering free, rapid, confidential HIV testing, PrEP referrals, and other essential resources in a welcoming and accessible environment. This initiative was led by Christopher

Concepción, our HIV/PrEP Navigator and Honorary Cacica 2023, and Alexandria Diamond, our 2024 Honorary Cacica.

Angel Cotto and Jeremy Alago conducted HIV tests for those present and shared updated information about PRCC services. Special thanks to Ricardo Jiménez, the PHI Director, who was also there on inauguration night, for his support and commitment.

PRCC's team is committed to community health and empowerment, which laid the foundation for this collaboration and ensured more people have access to essential services. You can find us at Fantasy Night Club every

second and fourth Sunday of the month, coinciding with the “Mas Leche” Latin Night, where we aim to create a space that celebrates culture while prioritizing health services and well-being.

Join The PRCC at Fantasy on Sunday evenings for music, health awareness, testing, and care because protecting your health should always be a priority. The testing team has created a safe ambiance free from stigma and directed toward services for the LGBTQ community. Please call Vida/SIDA at 773-278-6737 or contact our team for more information. We are excited to see you at Fantasy Night Club on Sunday.



Credit: Christopher Concepción

## Success Stories of Violence Prevention Programs Deeply Rooted in the Community

By *Xiomara Rivera*

This is more than just an R3 (Restorative Justice, Resilience, and Reentry program) success story—it's the story of four lives transformed through the dedication, perseverance, and honesty fostered by their own efforts and the guidance of R3 Program Violence Prevention Case Manager *Xiomara Rivera*, affectionately known as “Cece.”

*Lysandran Maldonado* joined the program due to struggles with street fighting. She often reacted emotionally rather than taking a step back to reflect. As a result, she was banned from prom, homecoming, and even removed from the softball team, where she excelled as an athlete. Despite these setbacks, *Lysandran* set goals for herself and achieved them. She committed to a period away from these privileges to demonstrate she could control her impulses and seek help instead of resorting to fights. Her efforts paid off—she regained access to softball, prom, and homecoming almost as quickly as she lost them. Once she earned them back, she never lost them again. Beyond changing her mindset, she put her growth into action, using her experiences to move forward. She actively participated in the Summer Outreach program and remained involved long after it ended. Even after

graduating from R3, she continues to engage with the program while balancing full-time work and college at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU).

*Demetrius Miranda* entered the R3 program with an active case in



*Lysandra Maldonado (R3 graduate), Xiomara Rivera (R3 Violence Prevention Case Manager), and Gael Campos (R3 graduate)*  
Credit: *Xiomara Rivera*

the Juvenile Court system. He was referred through a collaboration with the Juvenile Probation Department. He swiftly completed his mandatory court stipulations, earning an early release from his judicial obligations. Alongside his legal progress, he reached personal milestones, including securing full-time employment, which he continues to maintain.

*Johnathan Smith* first connected with R3 through the program's staple event, the Open Mic, where he has performed since its inception. While he was also facing a case, he was not referred to R3 through the courts. Instead, he became the program's

ness, “GGM.”

*Gael Campos* also joined R3 through its RJCC collaboration. Initially, he was solely focused on completing his ROHA, but with *Cece's* guidance and his own determination, he exceeded his expectations. He fulfilled his mental health requirements and community service hours, a journey that challenged him both physically and mentally. But he didn't stop there—he set personal goals, such as opening a bank account and attending college. Ultimately, *Gael* not only met his legal obligations, leading to his case being dismissed and expunged, but he also achieved his personal milestones. Today, he has a bank account and is a student at Northern Illinois University (NIU).

Through all their struggles, setbacks, and triumphs, *Cece* remained a constant source of support. The journey was not without its ups and downs, but those very challenges strengthened the participants and built relationships that may never have existed otherwise. The impact of these bonds is evident—every one of these graduates continues to be involved with R3 and PRCC events, volunteering their time and efforts as a testament to the growth and sense of community they found within the PRCC's *Xiomara Rivera R3 Program*.

# La Bodega Cooking Demonstrations — Pastel/Torta de Maduro Recipe

By Armando Nava

La Bodega del Barrio Food Bank is a food pantry serving primarily people living with or affected by HIV and families in need of food assistance.

La Bodega is one of The PRCC's Public Health Initiatives projects, offering the community food assistance, health education, nutrition education, referrals (to needed services), and physical activity.

This winter series, with the collaboration of Endeavor Health, La Bodega hosted cooking demonstrations. One of the items in December's class menu was Pastel/Torta de Maduro. Delicious, sweet, using minimal, natural ingredients

and no sugar added. Below is the recipe for you to try at home! For class schedule and services, call 773-342-0855.

Ingredients:

- 5 ripe plantains, peeled and mashed
- 2 cups grated mozzarella
- 3 beaten eggs
- ¼ cup coconut milk, (or your milk preference)
- 3 tbsp melted butter
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- ½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp salt

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. In a large bowl, combine all ingredients and mix well.
3. Pour mixture into a greased



Torta de Maduro

Credit: Armando Nava



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# El Schomburg Center Celebrates Puerto Rican Women in Arts

By Alexis Figueroa

It doesn't take an art expert to recognize that women in the arts across the globe have historically been marginalized, a trend driven by systemic patriarchy. Unfortunately, Puerto Rico is no exception.

Throughout my 20 years in the art scene, I have witnessed firsthand the disproportionate opportunities available to women artists. As I delved into Puerto Rican art history, I gradually uncovered the stories of countless women artists who have been forgotten for various reasons.

These innovative and talented individuals have left a significant mark on their time, yet they are often overlooked in discussions about art, and frequently overshadowed by their male counterparts.

This realization ignited a deep desire within me to bring about change. Although my efforts may seem small in the grand scheme of things, I believe we must honor and recognize the contributions of women in the arts, both from our island and its diaspora.

After months of extensive research, I successfully reached out to more than 280 artists, inviting them to participate in an upcoming exhibition. While I couldn't contact everyone, advancements in technology and social media allowed me to construct the most comprehensive database of living Puerto Rican women artists, now totaling more than 330.

This endeavor is not entirely unprecedented. Mari Mater O'Neill's publication, "Mujeres artistas protagonistas de los ochenta," focusing on women artists in Puerto Rico during the 1980s, served as an inspiration and foundation for my

initiative.

Other critical historical references include the 1989 exhibition "Mujeres Artistas de Puerto Rico" at Plaza Las Américas, the documentary "El Legado" produced by the Association of Women Artists of Puerto Rico and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico, the 1993 exhibition "Nuestro Autorretrato Mujeres Artistas de Puerto Rico," and Lisa Ladner's impressive "El-Status" webpage.

More recently, the exhibitions "Anarquistas y Dialectos 1 & 2" at the MAC and Raquel Torres Arzola's 2015 article "Viva la resistencia: Women artists in Puerto Rico and outside" have further illuminated the importance of this work.

With limited resources and no budget but fueled by our commitment to justice, Trailer Park Projects has partnered with El Schomburg to organize a groundbreaking exhibition that will showcase more than 140 living and working Puerto Rican women artists together in one space—an event taking place right here in Chicago.

To celebrate these remarkable artists and align with the theme for International Women's Day 2025, "Accelerate Action," we intentionally selected March for the exhibition opening.

"Puerto Rican Women in Arts" will welcome the public on Friday, March 7th, followed by an engaging artist talk on March 8th. This discussion will explore the history of Puerto Rican women in the arts and the myriad challenges they have faced.

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**WOMEN**

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EL SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE

PR

**OPENING FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2025**  
**6PM @ EL SCHOMBURG**  
 2538 W DIVISION ST. CHICAGO, IL 60622

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To ensure this unprecedented event is well-documented, we aim to raise funds for a catalog that will include the names and information of all participating artists, as well as those who could not be contacted or were unable to participate.

Our goal is to create formal documentation that future generations can utilize as both an educational resource and a directory for women artists from Puerto Rico and its diaspora. This work is made possible through the invaluable support of wonderful collaborators and col-

leagues, including Raquel Torres Arzola, Maria Josefina Melero, Aisha Pérez, Melissa Ramos, Brenda Torres, Mariel Quiñones, and many others added.

## Women in the Barrio: Recovering Forgotten Voices in Puerto Rican Chicago History

By *Angélica Hernández*

As we enter our third year, we are happy to say that Digitizing the Barrio (DTB) has come a long way from the attics and basements that once stored important pieces of Humboldt Park's revolutionary history. Today grey archival boxes line chrome shelves, each filled with the voices of a radical community. For example, DTB houses publications of organizations such as the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN), the National

Boricua Human Rights Network (NBHRN), and Freedom Now! We also have materials on the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN), as well as Vida/ Sida.

But as with most archives, what survives often fails to tell the whole story. As we processed thousands of archival documents, we discovered significant

silences and omissions in the records, particularly concerning

women. In an effort to rectify this problem—one long raised by critical archivists—Digitizing the Barrio will launch an oral history project in late March. We will organize and train a cohort of interviewers to conduct oral histories to preserve community history and memory. Not only do we want to address these gaps in the archival collection, we want to capture local community history with the community, not just for the community.

These conversations also sparked our desire to engage with the community more broadly. On March 20th, Digitizing the Barrio will host a Women's History Month event (see below for more) featuring local Puerto Rican scholars, Dr. Lilia Fernández, Professor of History, University of Illinois at Chicago; Dr. Maura Toro-Morn, Professor of Sociology at Illinois State University; and Dr. Mérida

M. Rúa, Professor of Latina/Latino Studies at Northwestern University. While this event is a celebration of their work, we hope that that community will also share their own lived experiences, memories, and family stories. Working closely with community members, these two initiatives will place women at the center of community collective memory and expand Digitizing the Barrio's capacity to generate compelling and informative historical narratives for multiple audiences.

Please join us on March 20th at ¡WEPA! Mercado del Pueblo at 2559 W Division St, Chicago, IL 60622 from 5:30-7:30 PM for Showcasing Chicago's Puerto Rican Women's History: A Panel and Discussion

If you are interested in joining the cohort or have any questions, please contact [Angélica Hernández](mailto:angelicah@prcc-chgo.org) at [angelicah@prcc-chgo.org](mailto:angelicah@prcc-chgo.org).



# La Sandwichera: a Puerto Rican Family-Owned Business Honors a Beloved Community Member's Legacy

By *Alonso Vidal*

Hanging from the red walls inside La Sandwichera, a local sandwich shop in Humboldt Park, Puerto Rican flags adorn the space.

The customers' voices blend with the loud salsa music coming from the speakers installed in the upper corners of the restaurant.

"Ham, pastrami, roast beef," reads a giant sign in the middle of the room.

Next to it, a photo of a young, smiling Giovannie E. Sánchez on a baseball field bears the dates June 1, 2001 – June 2022.

Giovannie Sánchez

was the son and brother of Mikey Sánchez Sr. and Jr.—the father-and-son duo that runs La Sandwichera. They decided to open the establishment two and a half years ago after Giovannie's unexpected death in a drowning accident.

"For us, it really is more than just a sandwich shop because we try to keep my brother's tradition alive. We try to keep his legacy alive," Sánchez Jr. said.

It was a way for them to keep the family together after the tragic accident, Sánchez Sr. said. Now, that family has grown.

"In the beginning, we



*Ivy Roque awaits for costumers orders at La Sandwichera*

got a lot of people supporting us right away because of what my dad has done in the past, but now that's been transformed to another level with my dad, myself, my aunt [a La Sandwichera worker], and our family creating a bigger family within the Humboldt Park community," Sánchez Jr. said.

Since then, La Sandwichera has worked to create a family environment—something crucial

nowadays, Sánchez Jr. said. "We try to create that feeling of you walking into your grandma's living room," he explained.

Sánchez Jr. said the community's response has been welcoming from the start because of his father's longtime involvement in the neighborhood.

La Sandwichera is a space that thrives on the community and its families, Sánchez Jr. said, which is why they try to give back in

various ways.

Every Thanksgiving, they close the shop to distribute 400 sandwiches to the neighborhood, Sánchez Sr. explained. His son used to provide meals for people experiencing homelessness every Thanksgiving. Now, they do it to honor him.

It's Giovannie Sánchez's legacy, Sánchez Sr. said. It's how they "keep him alive within us."

At the back of the restaurant, a large baseball



*Giovannie E. Sánchez tribute at La Sandwichera*

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trophy can be seen. Draped over the top is Giovannie E. Sánchez's baseball jersey. His team won it after he passed away, recalled Laura Sánchez, known by customers as "Titi," a worker at La Sandwichera and Giovannie's aunt.

She said they brought it to La Sandwichera to honor him.

Baseball, the sport that Giovan-

nie loved, is a key part of the establishment. Sánchez Sr. said they sponsor softball and baseball community teams.

Now, every weekend, in front of Giovannie's photo, the room fills with bats, mats, and the smell of baseball turf when players choose La Sandwichera after baseball and softball games.



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 Instructoras; Cristina, Vicky, Angeles & Liliana

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# \$30 Million Humboldt Park Health Wellness Center Opens, Bringing 'A Sanctuary' To West Siders

*The three-story fitness facility opens Monday after two years of construction and is the first part of a six phase project aimed at putting vacant hospital land to better use.*



*The newly opened Humboldt Park Health Wellness Center, 2933 W. Division St., in Humboldt Park on Jan. 14, 2025. Credit: Colin Boyle/Block Club Chicago*

*By Ariel Parrella-Aureli (re-printed from Block Club Chicago)*

HUMBOLDT PARK — A modern gym and health facility near Humboldt Park's namesake park is ready to welcome its first members.

Humboldt Park Health's wellness center, a three-story, 45,500-square-foot facility at 2933 W. Division St., is signing up members ahead of its official opening Monday.

The center was completed in December and offers people access to health and fitness services and ame-

nities, including an Olympic-sized swimming pool, gym, track, exercise classes and kids club.

The facility has a rehabilitation room for physical, occupational and speech therapy, in addition to offering nutritional counseling, diabetes education and cooking classes. Parking is available in the main lot at Humboldt Park Health, formerly Norwegian Hospital.

The center has six membership plans that range from \$68-\$170 a month, depending on family size and age. The \$150 joining fee will

be waived for those who sign up before Jan. 31, hospital officials said. People can sign up online or in person.

Sliding-scale memberships to the wellness center are also available to households making less than \$70,000, and subsidized memberships are offered to employees of the center and community partners like the Museum of National Puerto Rican Arts and Culture, according to the hospital.

"Our community celebrates many ethnicities, and every member of this community will have access to this center. This center represents health equity in action," José Sánchez, President and CEO of Humboldt Park Health.

Truniekia Franklin, a local business owner, parent and longtime Humboldt Park resident, signed up for a wellness center membership this week. The center's opening represents a renewed push for self care, as well as hope and strength she can pass onto her children, Franklin said.

"Health, both physical and mental, is sometimes felt like a luxury, a privilege for someone else, but today, that changes," Franklin said. "This

wellness facility is more than just walls and equipment. It is a sanctuary, a space where we can begin to rewrite the narrative of what it means to thrive in this community."

Community members and local dignitaries celebrated Tuesday's opening, highlighting the \$30 million investment from local and state bodies that brought the center to life and will bring more health care access and equity to West Siders.

"This is what health equity looks like, an investment of \$30 million right here in the heart of Humboldt Park for people and the community on the West Side of Chicago," said state Sen. Omar Aquino, who helped secure state money for the project and who lives a few blocks away. "What we have here today is we can help try to pass along something even better, a healthy life, an opportunity so that if my child is healthy and going to school, maybe they can learn a little bit more."

Humboldt Park residents have a diabetes rate more than three times that of people living in many other Chicago neighborhoods, according to data from the Institute for Diversity and Health Equity. About 46 percent of Humboldt Park house-

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holds say they are food insecure, compared to 13 percent of households nationwide, according to data from the institute.

The intention behind the wellness center is to address these numbers and improve community health before residents need access to more intensive medical services, and to help people establish healthy habits and lifestyles with the same dignity as other communities, leaders said.

“The Humboldt Park Health Wellness Center will ensure that we put prevention first, that the people of our community deserve wraparound services and access to wellness and workout facilities, and don’t need to make six figures a year to have that sort of lifestyle,” Ald. Jessie Fuentes (26th) said.

Construction on the project began in March 2023, led by architectural firm JGMA. Humboldt Park

Health previously hired the award-winning firm to redesign its first-floor hospital interior in 2020.

The wellness center is the first part of a six-phase project aimed at putting hospital land to better use, Sánchez said. Hospital leaders are looking to build affordable housing, a senior center and commercial buildings in the area surrounding the hospital in the coming years on vacant lots they own, he previously said.



The newly opened Humboldt Park Health Wellness Center, 2933 W. Division St., in Humboldt Park on Jan. 14, 2025. Credit: Colin Boyle/Block Club Chicago

*Celebrating*

*the Life of*

**Dolores Lopez Gomez**  
June 1, 1921 — January 31, 2025



Beloved husband of the late Natividad Carrasquillo Lopez; loving father of Rosita Lopez and son-in-law Anibal L. Taboas, Gladys E. Ramos and son-in-law Jose David Ramos, and Maria L.

Mercado and his late son-in-law, Jaime Mercado; adoring grandfather of Michael Ortiz, Joshua Ramos, Iliana Marciano Rzkiewicz, Eleazar Mercado, Samuel Ramos Miller, Gabriel Mercado and Daniel Marciano. Loving Great Grandfather to twins Ava and Jisella Ugo, Luke Rzkiewicz,

Gavin and Grayson Mercado, Triston and Darbis Abreu-Mercado, and Emma and Jasmeli Marciano-Mercado.

He persevered through the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria in 2017.

In 2024, a book documenting his extraordinary life was published, *Learning to Live: Lessons from the Storm*.

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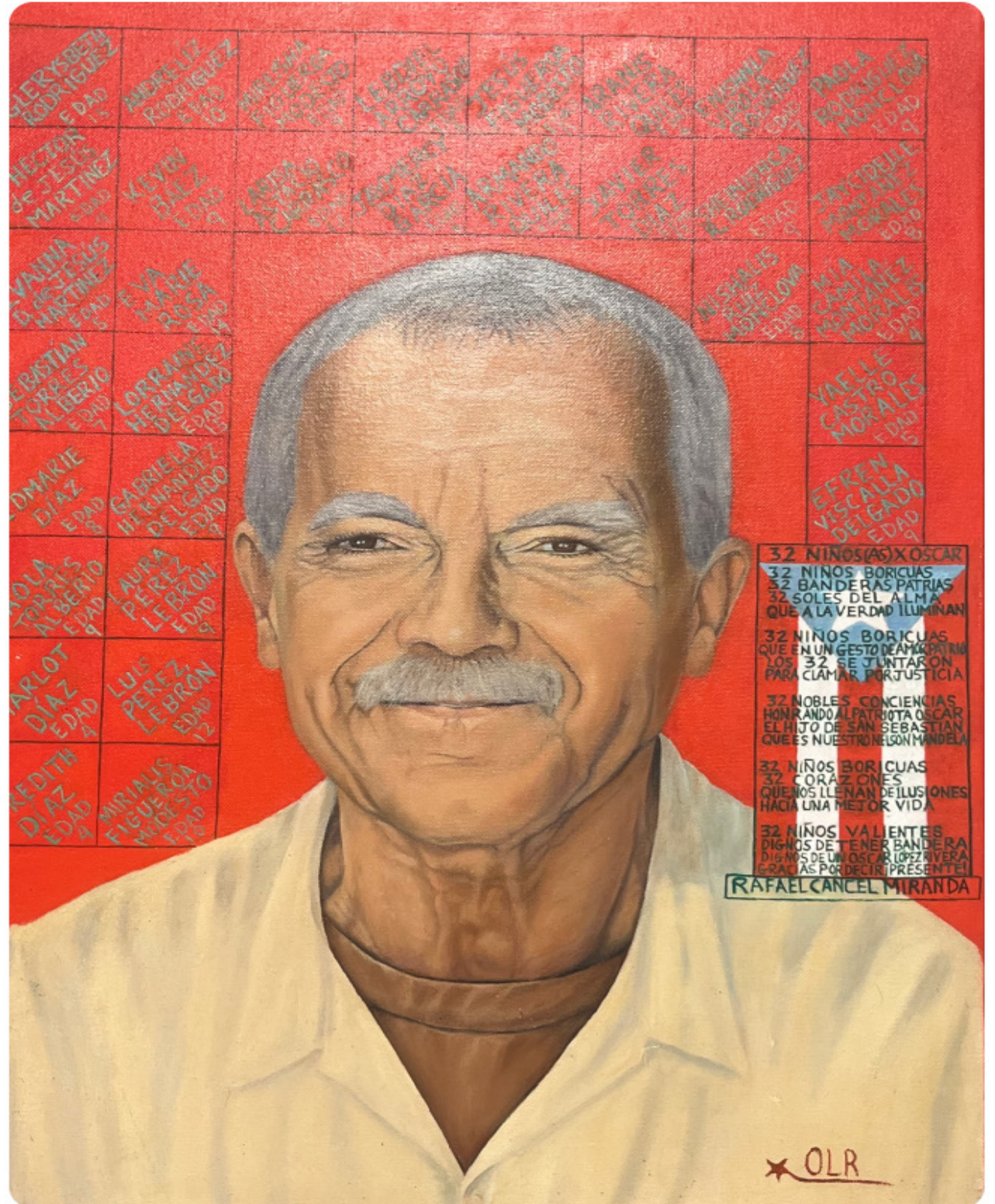
By Oscar Lopez Rivera

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