



Divulgando la cultura en dos idiomas spreading the culture in two languages

## NOTICIAS - News

ESP

### Leonard Mejia honored at Silver City veteran recognition

*By Carmen Cardinal*

The Aztecs are alive and well and they continue to be a great people. They have adapted to survive hostile invaders. Some live in rural areas. "We are like a hand, the fingers are different, but all make up one," Ramirez said, speaking of descendents of Aztecs from the Chichimec line of Northern Mexico. Other ancestors migrated south.

Ramirez spoke to the students about the language, culture and historic background of the Mexihcah people. He is a professor at Mexichco Tenochtitlan in Mexico. Sergio was born in Tenochtitlan and speaks the Nahuatl language. He received his B.A. in physical mathematic science at the University of the Valley of Mexico and his masters at the National School of Professional Studies.

He studied the Mexican warrior dance at Zemanahuak Tlamachtloyan, and has lectured in the United States, Europe, Canada and Mexico.



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"We are of common origin," he told the predominantly Hispanic youth. "The Mexihcah people still struggle for their identity in Latin America. We want you to know of our origins. Our poverty is great and our kids die of curable diseases," he said.

Ramirez said those lost tribes are not lost, but have moved to other regions of Latin America and continue to exist, despite efforts to erase their traces. Many could be the ancestors of Latino youth who have been born in Kansas City.

Many of their words continue to be used on a daily basis here in the United States, such as Seattle (seh- means one, and atle- means water). Michigan was originally Michoacan or Michoaces, but the English could not pronounce it. It means a place abundant with fish. Many words survive, such as tamale, atole, aguacate, guajolote (turkey), taco and chocolate. Chihuahua means, "Where the dry land begins." Xochimilco means "the land of cultivation."



The Spanish conquered the indigenous people using friendship to entice them and then enslaving the people.

"They said, 'We are representatives of a God, a powerful King, and we are his ambassadors,' " Ramirez said.

The Spanish were bad-smelling men, adorned by rusted metal, who ate raw fish and had bad breath. They did not wash private parts of their body and still, because of their white skin, were believed by the trusting Aztecs.

"These men enslaved us, branded us like animals, robbed our clothes, gold, silver gems," Ramirez said. "They said their religion maintained, 'Thou shalt not steal,' and then they stole from us.

"They said 'Thou shalt not kill,' but they had murderous wars. They called us cannibals. They said we should not covet the women of others, and then they distributed our grandmothers to their men. The women who had children, they gave them to the captains. The young women, they gave to the generals," Ramirez continued.

Even their priests blessed the soldiers before each war, and held a mass to tell God, "Help us kill lots of Indians; bless our weapons so that they don't fail."

"They asked this in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. After they killed the Indians, they had another mass to give thanks," he said.

They forced the indigenous people to give up their native names and adopt Spanish surnames. Names like Sanchez and Ramirez all came from Spain. Many young women were renamed Maria and young men were renamed Jose.

He said when Christopher Columbus came to America, the king emptied his prisons to man his ships. They came to kill and steal and were rewarded by the King. It was declared New Spain.

"In the 16th century, Europe was going through the medieval dark ages. "There [were] no scientific advances, no technology and no humanism," he said. "With that mentality they came here. We had scientific advances, humanities, and the Olmecs left astrology and the Aztec Calendar. It was a table of calculation. In the center, the sun and the solar system. It calculated that every 11 years there were solar sunspots."

Our scientists discovered sunspots only relatively recently.

"The moon is registered as well as 11 planets. There are nine planets that we know of, and one that



exploded, leaving many asteroids." We are alive and have not been exterminated," Ramirez added. He thanked the Guadalupe Center for allowing them to help tell their stories with dignity.

"You are proof that we exist. You should study, prepare and be able to liberate our society to progress as people and families."

Ihuipapalli Lopez has traveled around the United States with Ramirez to translate. "The Mexihcah: Keepers of the Fire and the Indigenous Council of Oaxaca" exhibit is being presented at the Guadalupe Center as a collaborative effort between the center and photographer Wesley Billinglea. Billinglea's documentary-style photographs of the ancestors of the Mexihcah show their modern day struggles as they continue to exist and try to hang onto their cultural ties with the past.

The mission of the traveling art exhibit is to give a voice to the Indians about their history and the daily struggles they face to be recognized as important members of society. Their stories are told through photography, art, documentary films, interviews, lecture series and a variety of educational materials.

An opening reception was recently attended by about 200 guests. Many of the visitors were out-of-town participants from the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture convention, a four-day event taking place at the Marriott Hotel sponsored by the Mattie Rhodes Center and the Hispanic Chamber of Greater Kansas City.

The exhibit will continue at the Guadalupe Center until Nov. 7 at 1015 Avenida Cesar E. Chavez in Kansas City, Mo. The gallery hours are Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. For information or to schedule tours, call (816) 421-1015. A special Dia de Los Muertos exhibit will also be included in the tour.

[^Back to TOP](#)