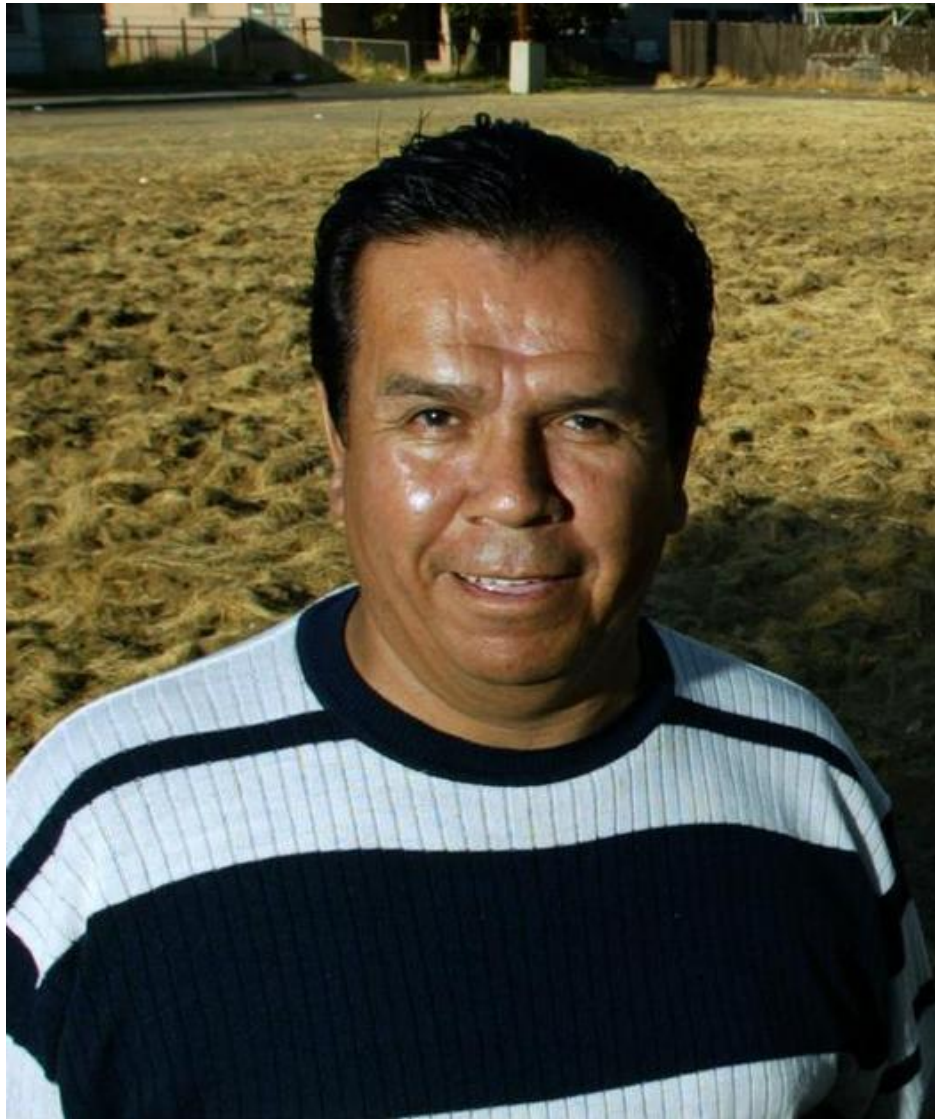


EDITORIAL: Alfonso Hernandez, mentor of youth, left a big mark on Fresno



When Alfonso Hernandez spoke about the power of education and its ability to transform lives for the better, he spoke from experience.

THE FRESNO BEE

The Fresno City Council had one of its easiest votes ever when it unanimously approved the renaming of the Chicano Youth Center at Dickey Playground in honor of Alfonso Hernández on Thursday.

Mr. Hernández, who died of a heart attack the morning of Jan. 6 at age 64, was a friend and mentor of Fresno area youth, particularly those from challenging circumstances and at risk of throwing away their lives to drugs and gangs.

To say that he gave everything he had to kids and young adults in our city would be an understatement. In 1993, he received a \$50,000 fellowship from the California Wellness Foundation and donated it to the Chicano Youth Center, which he had founded in 1977.

“He will always be here with us,” said City Council Member Sal Quintero, who led the effort to rename the center after Mr. Hernández. “He left his footprints (and) handprints in Fresno.”

Juan Esparza Loera, editor of Vida en el Valle and a member of the editorial board, said this of Mr. Hernández in an obituary article published Jan. 14: “Alfonso Hernández was a quiet leader whose actions always spoke louder than his words.”

He was a busy leader, too.

Mr. Hernández brought gang leaders together to iron out their differences. He helped set up more than 45 Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) chapters at high schools. He organized low-rider car shows, concerts, recreational sports leagues and protest marches. And he obtained grants that funded award-winning after-school science programs.

When Mr. Hernández spoke about the power of education and its ability to transform lives for the better, he spoke from experience. One of 10 children in his family, he was born and raised in west Fresno. He started picking grapes and pruning vines when he was 10.

“It was rough,” his brother Danny Hernández told The Bee’s Andrea Castillo. “He did that and then went to college.”

Mr. Hernández graduated from then Central Union High School, attended Fresno City College and received bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Fresno State in social work.

While at Fresno State, he became a social activist and joined MEChA. And he learned how to secure grants to fund his causes — one of which was opening a center to serve minority students.

Mr. Hernández was smart, passionate and practical. Quintero told of the time that the city parks and recreation department put together a sports program for Hmong youth. Problem was, no one was showing up to play volleyball, basketball and softball.

Meanwhile, the Chicano Youth Center sports leagues were brimming with Hmong kids. Quintero asked, how do you do it?

“Oh, that’s real easy. We lowered the nets and the hoops, and we brought the bases a little closer,” Mr. Hernández replied.

People often ask what it will take to move Fresno forward. Part of the answer is for more people to give of themselves with the determination that Mr. Hernández did.

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