

News: Press Releases

IU Bloomington's La Casa celebrates its 30th anniversary

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BLOOMINGTON, Ind. -- When Indiana University Professor Iris Rosa first came to Bloomington as a student in 1968, the East Chicago, Ind., native saw very few Latino students on campus.

"The atmosphere at IU was lonely," recalled Rosa, who earned her bachelor's degree from IU in 1973 and a master's degree the following year. "It was very different down here, coming from an area that embraces your culture because you live around other Latinos."

According to Rosa, it took the mobilization of the Latino student body to create an environment and a place that would make college life more welcoming to Latino students. She later became the first tenured Latina professor on the Bloomington campus.

On Sept. 26-28, Rosa will gather with current and former students to celebrate the opening of the Latino Cultural Center. "La Casa," which opened its doors 30 years ago, was a place where Latino students like Rosa could congregated, be educated and learn more about themselves in a diverse Latino culture on a campus with a white majority.

"It became very apparent that this was an important time to get that particular structure, where people could hang out, meet other students, and conduct and create activities that were pertinent to Latino culture," said Rosa, who was a graduate student when La Casa opened.

Lillian Casillas, who came to IU Bloomington as a student in 1985 and is the current director of La Casa, said many Latino students, including her, struggle with finding themselves on the campus. La Casa provides one-on-one attention for those students.

Describing herself as a frequent visitor to La Casa as a student, Rosa remembers using La Casa for dance group rehearsals and group meetings and as a place to socialize. Casillas was not involved with La Casa until her senior year, but then became an active member to help other Latino students suffering from what she described as an identity crisis.

Today, students can go to La Casa and find a place like home and a little more. Through the center, students have reached out beyond the campus into the community, providing community services for Latinos and Latin American immigrants in the Bloomington area. Students have offered tutoring, helped with translation and hosted community services. La Casa continues to have educational forums about the diverse Latino culture.

Guadalupe Anaya, an IUB alumna and former assistant dean for University Division, said she feels the students are responsible for La Casa's success. She said it is the Latino family values that the students bring with them which have made La Casa and the campus what they are today.

"Students were the organized voice," added Casillas, who hopes many past and present students will return for the celebration.

The celebration will be highlighted by the first Latino alumni reunion. In addition, several activities have been planned including the Festival Latino music event on Sept. 27 in IUB's Dunn Meadow. The anniversary celebration will conclude on Sept. 28 with the Latino alumni business meeting. For more information, contact Casillas at 812-855-0174 or mlcasill@indiana.edu.

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