

Friday, May 27, 2016

Laramie County Library hosts discussion on local Latino history



Ann Redman, center, interacts with librarian Carey Hartmann, left, and Lorraine Salazar before her presentation about Latino influences in Cheyenne at the Laramie County Library on Thursday. Hugh Carey/Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Ann Redman highlights people's impact on local community throughout the years

By Kristine Galloway
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

CHEYENNE — Ann Redman greeted her audience at the Laramie County Library on Thursday in Spanish, which was appropriate for a discussion on local Latino history and influence.

"Buenas noches," she said, followed by, "¿Cómo están?" For those who do not speak Spanish, that's "Good evening" and "How are you?"

Redman spoke at the library as part of its "Latino Americans: 500 Years of History" program, which began April 25. Library patrons still can visit the exhibit on the first and third floors through June 5.

"I think it's important for our younger generation to know the challenges that have come before them that have granted them the opportunities that they have — the opportunity to go to any restaurant they want, to go

to a movie and not have to sit in a certain place, to be able to live where they want, to have the opportunities for education," Redman said.

Redman, who is president of the Hispanic Organization for Progress and Education (HOPE), was born in Ledoux, New Mexico, and moved to Cheyenne during World War II. Redman said she took her first communion at St. Mary's Catholic Church. Her family then moved to California before returning to Cheyenne when Redman was 14.

Her family is quite prevalent in Cheyenne history. Redman's father, Martin Esquibel, was the first director of Community Action of Laramie County. He also was a volunteer for the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens. Martin Esquibel Drive by the Cheyenne Aquatic Center is named for him.

Redman came from a family of nine children, and

two of her brothers serve in the Wyoming Legislature: Sen. Floyd Esquibel, D-Cheyenne, and Rep. Ken Esquibel, D-Cheyenne.

Redman recounted various instances of racial discrimination she encountered growing up.

"I entered school not speaking English — I can't remember how I learned it — but in school, learning to read, that's the first time I ever remember being laughed at," she said.

She also explained that when she was younger, Latinos were not allowed to live north of Pershing Boulevard and weren't allowed to eat in many restaurants, including one she worked at.

Redman said one of the reasons she was able to become successful was because of Ed Yarter, a former boss of hers.

Redman said Yarter asked her upon high school graduation what she

At a glance

Ann Redman, president of the Hispanic Organization for Progress and Education (HOPE), spoke about local Latino influence at the Laramie County Library on Thursday night as part of its "Latino Americans: 500 Years of History" program, which runs until June 5.

planned to do with her life and then offered to pay for her to attend Park Business College.

"I really wanted to go and be a teacher. I would have loved to have gone to the university. All of my classmates were going to college, and I couldn't go to college. We couldn't afford it."

Redman said she told Yarter she would like to attend Park Business College because the school promised to find students a job.

But Redman said that

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when she asked the principal of the college about getting an office job, he told her, "Frankly, Miss Esquibel, I don't think you're capable."

But at her insistence, he found her an interview with a law firm and she got the job.

And Redman isn't alone in facing discrimination. She told of Dolores "Coke" Gonzalez, who used to take young Latino kids to parks around Cheyenne to play baseball.

"People were complaining because these — Latinos, Hispanics, Chicanos — these dark-skinned kids were playing in their neighborhood. And they didn't want these kids playing in their neighborhood," Redman said.

"So he went to the City Council at the time and said, 'If you don't want these kids playing in your parks, then we need a park in west Cheyenne.' So thank you, Coke Gonzalez, for getting a park in west Cheyenne."

That park has since been named Martin Luther King Park, and Redman spearheaded an effort to have the baseball park in the park named for Gonzalez, who died in 2001.

Redman said people often forget the influence Latinos have on history across the nation, including forgetting that Latinos were in the country before the English.

"It's not just Latino history. It's American history," Redman said.