

Celebrate El Comité!

El Comité de Longmont recently celebrated over 40 years of service to the Longmont community at a meet-and-greet with its new director, Lisa Moreno. This iconic organization is the heart of Longmont, providing assistance in navigating systems, personal counseling (casework), legal referrals, drivers' license appointments, English language classes, and help with filling out citizenship papers for all immigrants. We should celebrate the leaders, past and present, and know the history of this wonderful community resource.

On August 14, 1980, Jeff Cordova and Juan Garcia, two young Latinos returning from a wedding were shot and killed on Main Street by two Longmont police officers. The Longmont community was shocked and angry, especially the Hispanic community. Dan Benevidez said, "I remember so clearly that night, Friday evening, I got a phone call from Marta Moreno, 'Two of our boys have been killed. Police shot two of our boys, Dan,'" Benevidez said. "I will never forget that moment. We've got to meet. We've got to do something." Community member Vic Vela said, "It woke Longmont up! . . . You can't just say, 'It ain't gonna happen here. Well, it did.'" Community members Marta Moreno, Vic Vela, Ed Navarro, and Dan Benevidez were joined with Richard Lathrop, Richard Mendez, Ester Blazon, Frida Garcia, Mark Rodrigues, Tony Tafoya and Longmont's Latino community to demand justice and the voice of peace for a very angry and hurt community and prevent the violence that could have occurred. A fund for the young men's family was started. According to El Comité's website, "El Comité helped organize a candlelit vigil and march to Longmont's City Council. The protesters arrived with 1,000 names on a petition and let it be known that relations between the police and the public needed to be reformed. Latino community leaders began work with the U.S. Department of Justice to advocate for the rights of Latinos and improve community relations with local law enforcement and the community at large. El Comité became incorporated on November 26, 1980." Marta Moreno was the director of El Comité for many years

When Mike Butler became Chief of Public Safety (chief of both fire and police) in 1993, the community truly had an advocate for justice and community service. He said, "There were very much expectations that our Latino community wanted to be met by our police services, I remember sitting down on several occasions with key Latino leaders in our community who expressed with deep, heartfelt emotion, not only the desire for police to change and work in partnership, but an expression of hope as to what could be." The police department reexamined how it recruited, trained, and supervised officers. El Comité board now had both police and city council liaisons to be connected to the public safety and policy-making of the city. Out of tragedy came a better community for the whole town. The strong, collaborative voice of the Longmont Latino community has been an enduring example heard nationwide. We need to remember and be proud.

My father was an immigrant and he only had his brother to help him. I wish he had had a group like El Comité. La familia is the heart of Latino culture. El Comité is la familia, people you are treated you with warmth and respect, and you will be helped if you need it.

Polly Christensen, former Longmont City Council liaison to El Comité

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