



Francisco Miguel Nava Vega – López Tapia  
February 28, 1922 – July 25, 2021



Born San Antonio, Texas; the first child of six



Six months old



First Communion

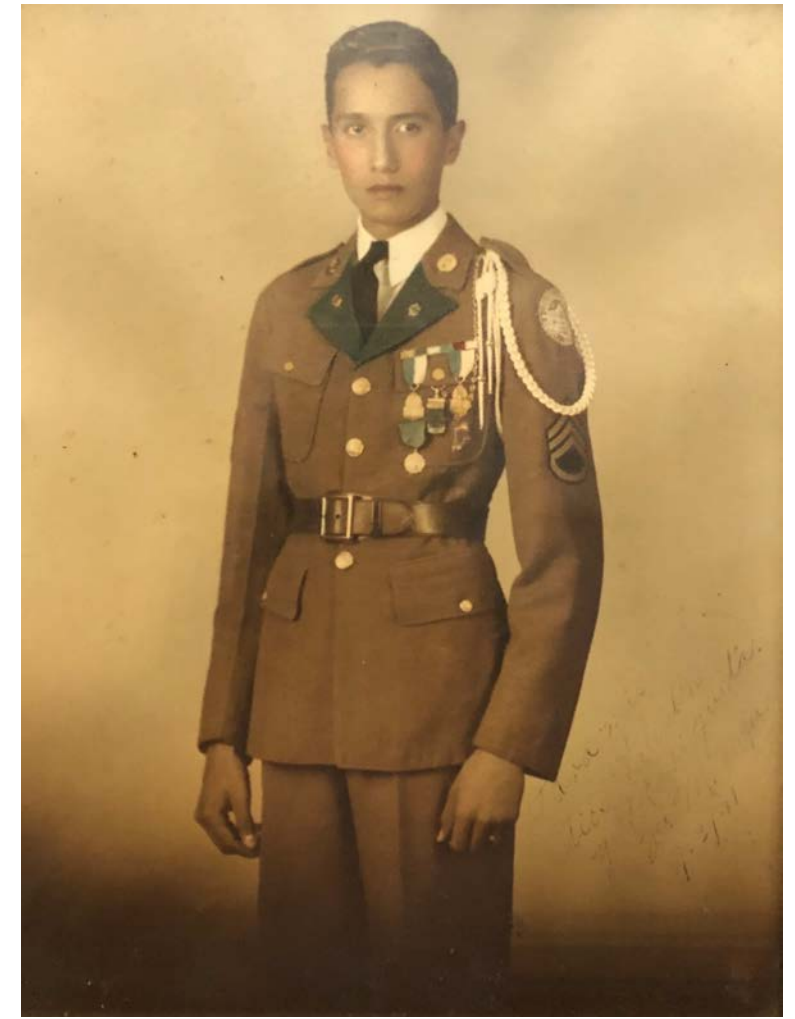


Francisco with his parents:  
 Sarita Lopez Tapia de la Vega born  
 Saltillo, Mexico and Lazaro Nava Vega,  
 born San Antonio, Texas



His Grandmother, parents holding their youngest Lazaro;  
 Uncle Francisco and Valentin and their wives, brothers and sisters:  
 Ninfa on the far left, Angie far right, Francisco, Guillermo (Bill) in front,  
 and Lydia.





Changed his name to “Mike” in order to attend the best elementary school in San Antonio. His social security card reads, Frank Mike Vega.  
He excelled in engineering, business and typing. His aptitude for speed typing at 13 later set him apart for specialized training in decoding during World War II





In high school, Francisco in a typing competition achieved an average of 117-120 words per minute on a manual typewriter. He received a silver and gold medal as the state champion and a scholarship to business college.

## Ingresó al Ejército



FRANCISCO M. VEGA

El joven Francisco Miguel Vega, ingresó como voluntario al Ejército el día 20 de octubre de 1942. El 28 del mismo mes asistió a las maniobras del Campo Kelly, como "Flight Leader". El 29, después de mandar un escuadrón de 240 hombres obtuvo el grado de sargento, después de recibir las felicitaciones de sus superiores.

Posteriormente pasó a las oficinas del teniente Montgomery, en donde alcanzó el grado de sargento mayor. El 12 de los corrientes ingresó a la "Louisiana State University", en Baton Rouge, La., en donde perfeccionará sus estudios en administración militar.

Antes de ingresar en las filas del Ejército, el joven Vega se había graduado en la "Central Catholic High School", de esta ciudad, en la que obtuvo una medalla de oro y una beca en el "Draughon's Business College". Además fue condecorado con una medalla de plata por el "Batallón Azul", al que perteneció tres años.

Francisco Miguel Vega cuenta 22 años de edad, y es hijo del señor Lázaro N. Vega y de la señora María López Tapia de Vega, que residen en W. Travis 3-18, de esta ciudad.

On the day Pearl Harbor was attacked, December 7, 1941, Francisco received a call from his Uncle Valentin from Mexico. He told him, "Our family has a long tradition of service to country. Your country now is being attacked. So report, offer your services."

The following day, Francisco went to the Marines, Air Corps, Merchant Marine, and the Navy to enlist. They all told him they were not taking Mexicans at this time and that he'd have to wait until October when they would start calling up minorities. They classified him as "Mexican" even as he was born in the United States.

Months later in October, Francisco saw a full-page ad in the San Antonio Newspaper mentioning that they needed people with military experience to train those being drafted. With three years of ROTC, Francisco was able to voluntarily offer his service by becoming a Drill Instructor to train draftees.



With his father





Following his station as drill sergeant, he underwent testing in engineering and math. He was chosen for the elite JAG specialized training at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. There, he met Phyllis Jean Lackland while training on campus. Phyllis said that she never met anyone like him. They fell in love, making plans to marry after the war.





At the famous Palombos  
Restaurant in Philadelphia,  
1943



At the top of the Eiffel Tower

Francisco landed on the D Day beach in Normandy, France, June 6, 1944 as a part of the largest invasion in history. With his JAG training and typing speed, he was a decoder at the top of the Eiffel Tower. He served in 5 campaigns, including the Battle of the Bulge, the deadliest battle of WWII. For a man who was not accepted for his volunteerism at the onset of the war, he returned home with several medals, the bronze arrowhead and bronze star.





Paris and Chantilly France



Following the war, Francisco returned to ask for the hand of Phyllis. He was never given an answer by her parents. As he said years later, in his typical humor, "They didn't like earth tones." After waiting many months, Phyllis and Francisco eloped. She took the train alone from Chicago where she was working, and he from San Antonio. They met in Saint Louis, MO where they stayed with some friends that he served with in the war.



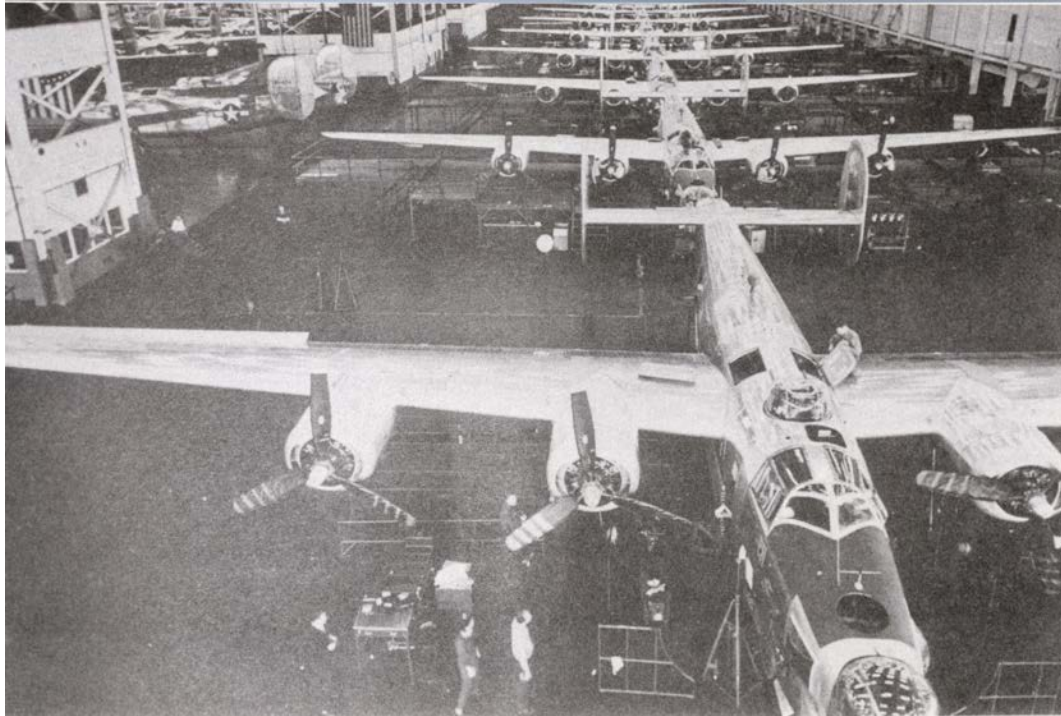


May 10, 1946, Francisco M Vega and Phyllis  
Jean Lackland were married



After sending a telegram to her parents, they honeymooned in Mexico and moved to San Antonio where Phyllis was welcomed by his family. Francisco started an embroidery business with his sister, Ninfa before leaving for college. Phyllis did not hear from her parents or sister for almost 5 years.





Francisco and Phyllis moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan and lived in Willow Run, a bomber factory that was quickly converted to married housing for the returning GI's. Francisco was pursuing a degree in Business Administration.



While at U of M, Francisco and Phyllis met George and Doris Heartwell- their behind the thin walls of Willow Run neighbors. Francisco and George became lifetime best friends and fishing companions.





## Aquinas College to Field Its First Track Team

Aquinas college will take another big step up the ladder of athletic prestige this spring when it fields a track team for the first time in the school's history.

The Toms hit their zenith on the basketball floor this season by producing the best team ever to represent the Red and Gray; and their diamond squad appears destined for the same honors even at this early date. Athletic Director Joel Nagle, therefore, plans to push his department into an even more prominent position, and feels a track team will do much to further the cause.

When plans were first formulated for a track team, no coach was available. Jules Sommer, a former Catholic Central shot-putter, volunteered to take over the job and get things organized. He is now

acting in the capacity of manager, participant, and coach.

"We're not certain just how this venture will come out," states Jules. "We've got a few boys who were terrific in high school, but several of them haven't competed since the war years and may have a lot of trouble getting back into shape."

"On the other hand, some good boys just one year removed from competition have picked up equipment and have shown plenty of enthusiasm."

### He'll Learn Also.

Sommer doesn't try to give the impression he knows all there is to know about the sport, but he's brushing up on it so he'll have a little better background. Jules plans to let the men in each event

pace themselves in their own respective groups, as he feels they will know more of what they can and cannot do than will he. However, Sommer will work a lot with the weight men, as he has had experience in that line.

He's not worried about the boys "going lazy" on him. "We all know we're out here for a purpose—that of starting a track team at Aquinas. We also know we'll get out of it just what we put into it," he adds.

More than twenty aspirants have been working out; thus far,

Heading the dash candidates is John Young, who did his high school running for Bay City St. James. He has been reportedly clocked in :3.8 in the 100-yard dash. Burrough Phillips of Union, Don Roback of

Catholic, and John Nowak, also of Catholic, round out the sprint contingent.

### Good Half-Miler.

Another Catholic Central boy, Marion Graff, appears to be a good bet in the 440. Dick Land from Bay City St. Joseph's is another quarter-mile contender and will also try the 220 and broad jump.

Tom Baronowski, who ran behind Catholic's Joe Host last year, has posted a 2:03 time while running against the city high school 850 record-holder and appears to be rounding into form fast this year. Ray Emerson will provide company for Tom in their specialty.

Only two distance men have reported thus far. They are Chuck Dawson from Flint St. Michael's,

a lad who never ran in high school but he has posted a 2:05 half-mile on the indoor YMCA track, and Frank Vega, a tall Mexican chap from San Antonio, Tex., whose brother, Bill, is one of the choice pitching prospects on Aquinas' baseball squad. Frank also is interested in a berth on the mile relay team.

Ray Fenwick of Catholic and Harry Orgren are the broad jump specialists. Orgren hails from Saginaw St. Andrew's.

### Cougars on Hurdles.

Three more Catholic Central boys form the hurdles group. They are Fenwick, Tom Mikulenka and John Stephanovich.

Pole vaulters include Ed Strubel, who has scored over 11 feet, Orgren, and Roback, the latter having cleared 11 feet 3 inches in high school.

Bill Westoph of Saginaw St. Mary's has pegged the 16-pound shot 42 feet and appears to be the best in that event, although Jerry Melke and Sommer hope to give him some competition before the season ends.

The Tommies will not compete in the discus or javelin events.

At the present time, meets with Grand Rapids Junior college, Calvin and Muskegon JC have been scheduled along with the possibility of a triangular meet with Muskegon JC and one of the local colleges. Other meets may be scheduled as needed.



**TOMMIES PREPARE FOR NEW SPORT**—Six of the more than twenty candidates working out nightly in preparation for the inauguration of track at Aquinas college limber up before The Press cameraman. They are, from left to right: Jules Sommer, shot-putter and coach; Marion Graff, 440 candidate; Tom Mikulenka, hurdler; Ray Fenwick, hurdler; Dick Land, dashman and broad jumper, and Francisco Vega, distance man. The first four hail from Catholic Central, Land from Bay City St. Joseph's and Vega from Central Catholic in San Antonio, Tex.

—Grand Rapids Press Photographer.

## Aquinas Seniors Choose Officers

Senior class elections at Aquinas college Friday named Jack Quinn, 19, as president. The class, largely in the school's history, has 74 members. The officers named are: Vice president, Mary Ann Jaracz; treasurer, Shirley Peters, both of Grand Rapids; and secretary, Frank Vega, San Antonio, Tex.

Francisco transferred to Aquinas College after two years, earning his degree in Business Administration and a letter in track, listed here as the "tall Mexican chap", and one in tennis. He taught himself tennis by ordering the manual from Wheaties cereal. He was a class officer his senior year at Aquinas. As a bi lingual and bi cultural college student, he taught Spanish to students in East Grand Rapids homes and managed three local movie theaters. Francisco and Phyllis lived in rented parts of homes as there were not any apartments in Grand Rapids. Photos: A formal dance at Aquinas and on campus with friends



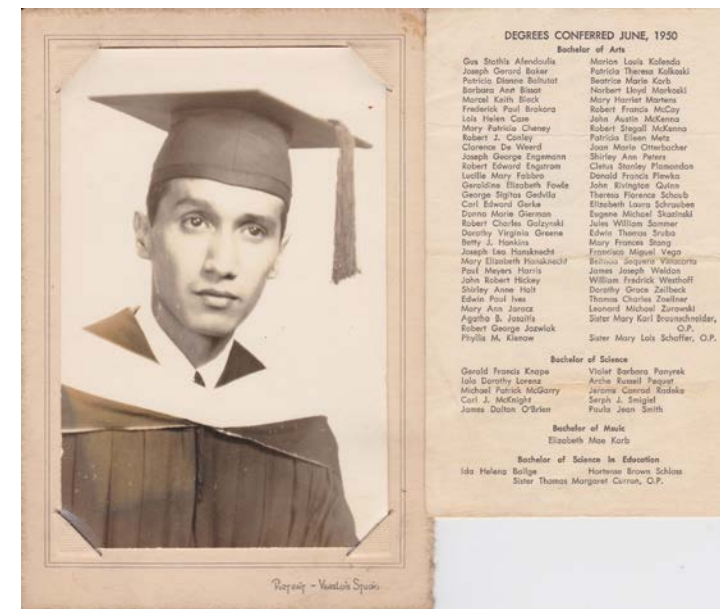
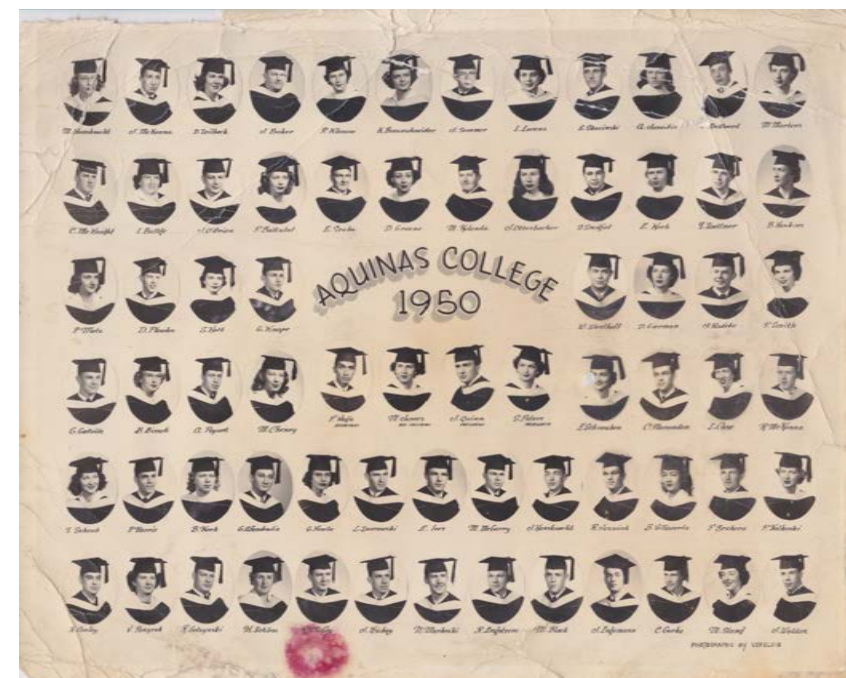


College days and a visit to the Holland Tulip Festival. Francisco's sisters Ninfa and Angie came for a visit. Three of his other siblings followed their brother and moved to Grand Rapids.





The graduating class of 1950. Francisco Miguel Nava Vega Lopez Tapia was the first Latino to graduate from Aquinas.





Summer of 1955 living in their  
second home on Giddings Ave.





1957 family portrait with Francisco's parents, grandmother and siblings. Francisco was interested in photography and staged several family portraits over the years.



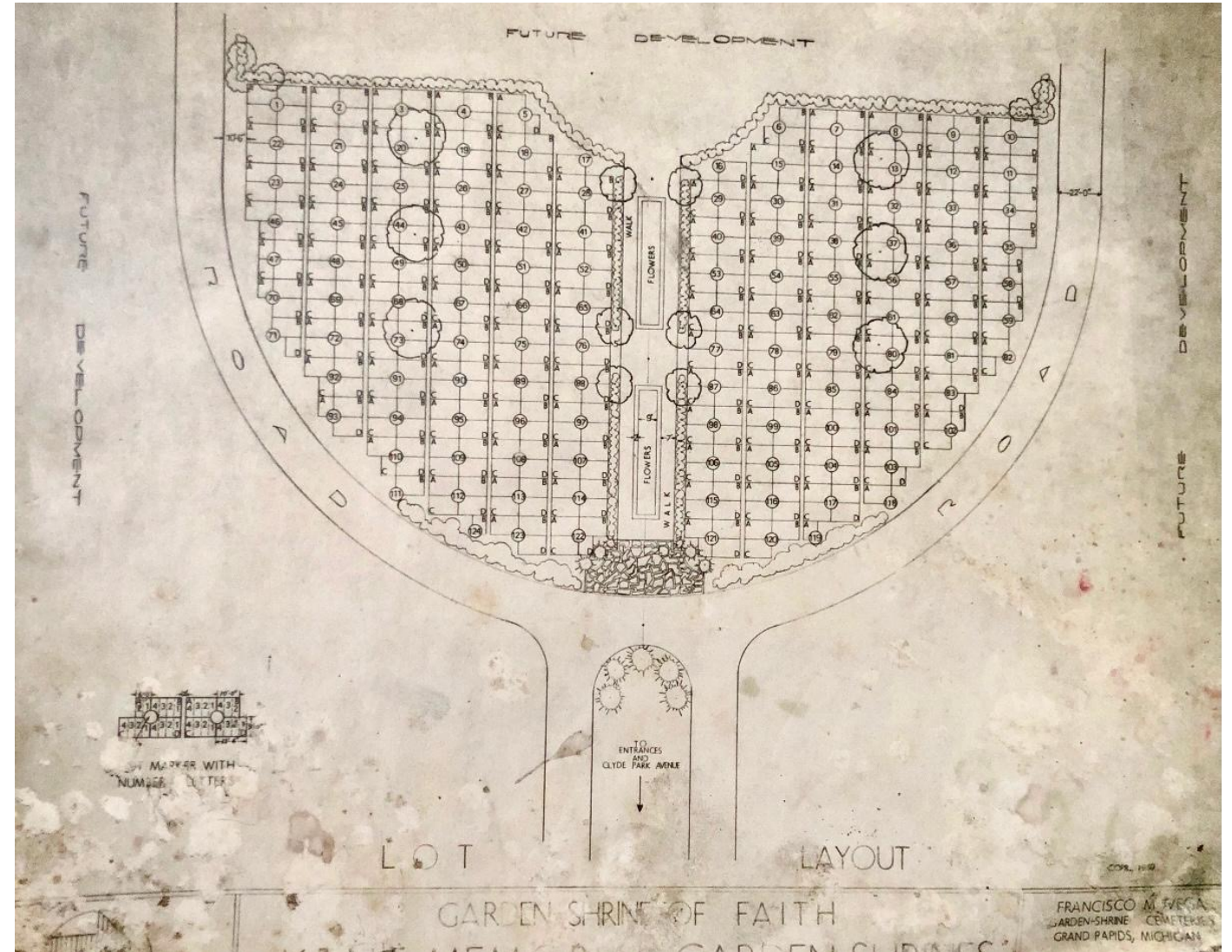
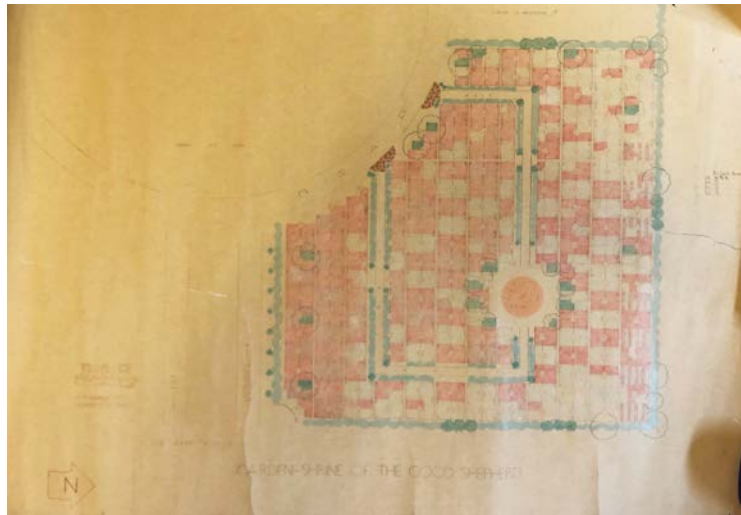
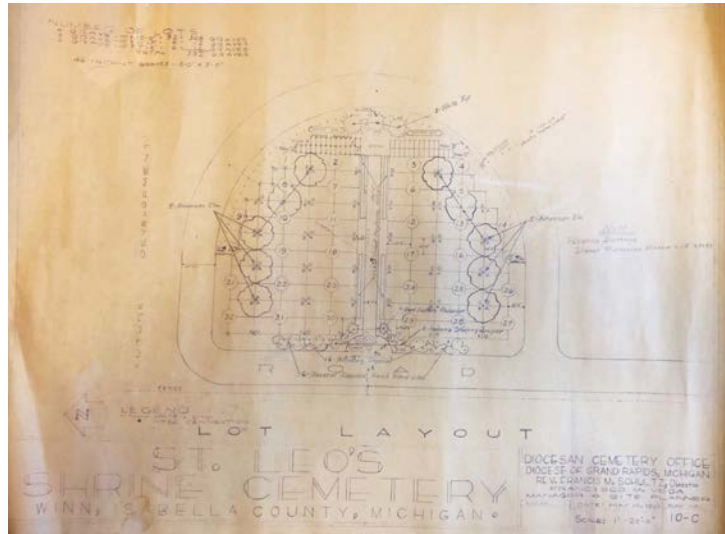
A growing family moved across the street to a new home. Francisco sent for the designs of this playhouse and built it in the backyard, complete with shingles, glass windows and door. The sandbox to the right is one of his designs to avoid splitters.



“ Pilo, my close and true friend who brought joy and happiness to so many”

After managing cemeteries in Kansas City and Michigan, in 1955 Francisco bought 80 acres of land in Byron Center and designed the first privately owned cemetery that accepted all burials, races, religions and cultures. Previously people were buried in separate cemeteries or sections. He taught himself to draft and created all the gardens, layout of the roads, monuments and landscape. Kent Memorial Gardens was designed as four contemporary gardens, without upright markers. These fountains had a flame in the center with water spilling over the edges. Building a cemetery such as this, presented a very difficult road in the 50's and 60's with set backs due to racism. He was not deterred and pursued this dream for most of his life giving away hundreds of cemetery lots to those who could not afford burials and designing a bench for his closest friend, George Heartwell Sr. as well as a monument to Porfirio Murillo.





Commissioned drawings done for the St. Leo's Cemetery and two of his many hand drafted drawings for the Garden of the Good Shepherd, and Garden Shrine of Faith, Kent Memorial Gardens



Francisco was a excellent marksman with both the bow and arrow and hunting rifle. He maintained his love of the outdoors and fishing his entire life.



Gill Press Photo

HOLDING A STEADY POINT at the age of seven weeks is "Brok," a vizsla pup owned by Frank Vega, 1317 Giddings Ave. SE. A pointer-retriever breed from Hungary, the vizsla is rarely seen in this country. Brok shows his birdy instincts on a pheasant wing which Vega casts with a fishing rod in his back yard.



He hunted with his dogs and trained his pure bred Champion Vizslas in field trials. He also competed with them in national dog shows.





Family was always first for Francisco and he supported each member of his tribe, always





Francisco, “Pancho” to those who knew him well, was intensely focused on creating change that he knew was needed. He had a vision that if people understood, were made aware, many injustices would be resolved. He spent his life embracing this philosophy, sometimes with humor, sometimes with celebration, but always with a determined informed voice.

## Panel of Americans, PTA Calendar



### Wednesday

Lakeside PTA will present the Panel of Americans at 8 p.m. in the Wealthy School auditorium. Panel members will be Rev. Hugh M. Beahan, Mrs. Julius Franks, Mrs. Samuel Horowitz, Dr. Edward Jones, Mrs. John B. Martin, Mrs. Leonard Newman and Francisco M. Vega. A discussion period will follow.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT—Wednesday at the Lakeside PTA meeting will be the Panel of Americans, a volunteer group of citizens attempting to help racial, religious and ethnic groups understand each other. Going over some of their material are, standing, left to right,

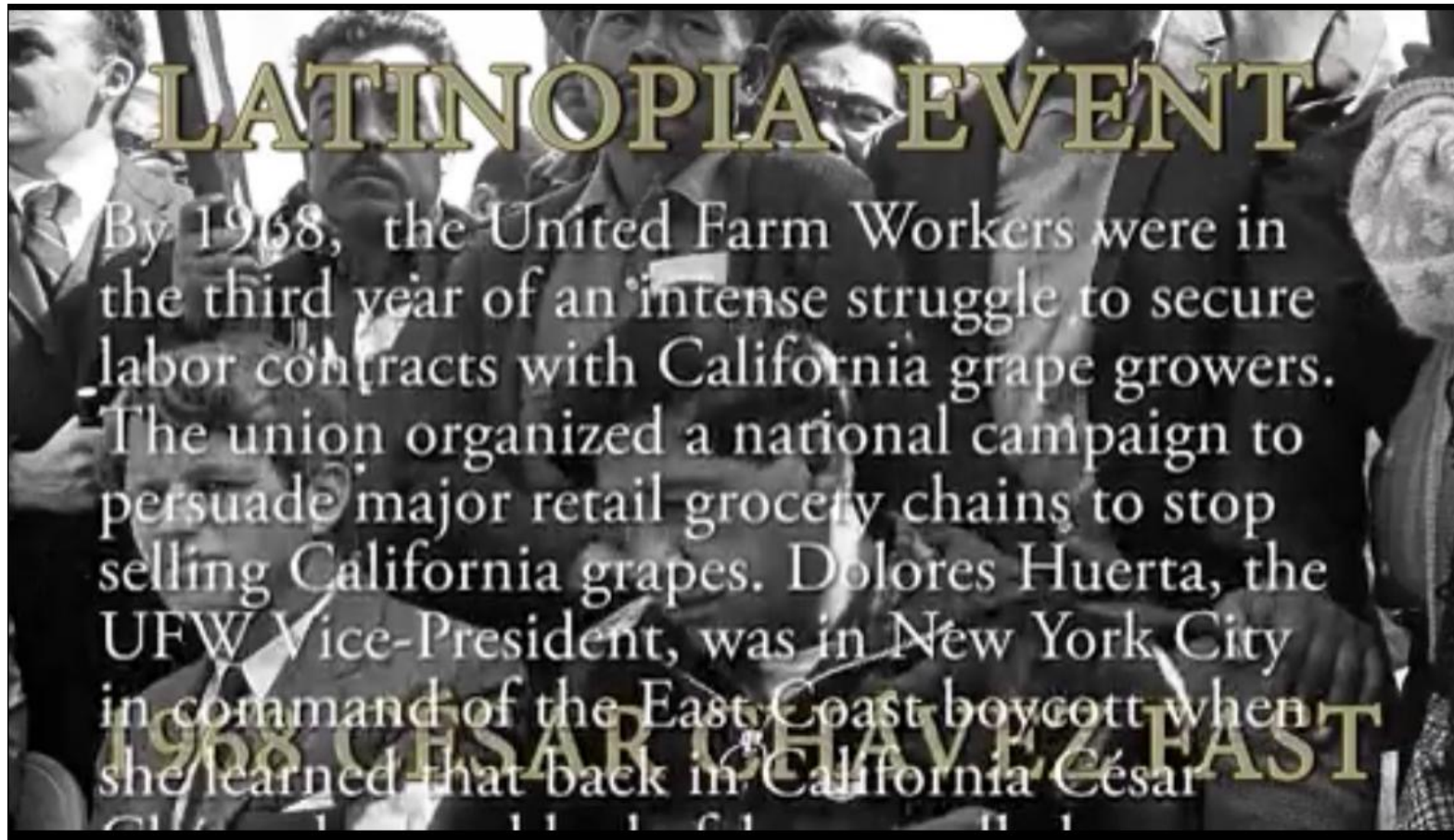
Rev. Hugh M. Beahan and Francisco M. Vega, and sitting left to right, Mrs. Samuel Horowitz, Mrs. Julius Franks and Mrs. Leonard Newman. The meeting will be held at 8 p.m. in the Wealthy School auditorium, formerly the East Grand Rapids High School building.



—Grand Rapids Press Photomontage  
STILL "ON THE ROAD"—Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Negro, Spanish-American and other groups are represented on the Panel of Americans which will appear before the Ottawa Hills PTA next Tuesday and which is still "going strong" after 18 months of operation. Panel members in this circle are, from left, Francisco M. Vega, Mrs. Sam Horowitz, Sister Mary Teresa, Dr. Edward Jones, Mrs. Leonard Newman, Rev. Hugh M. Beahan, Mrs. Julius Franks, Douglas Hillman, Mrs. William B. Scott, original chairman; Mrs. James A. Starr, Ralph Arriaga and Mrs. Carl A. Thomason, center, chairman. Panel members absent are Dr. Roel Bykerk, Prof. Lewis B. Clingman, Mrs. John B. Martin, Ricardo Meana and Mrs. Hollis Reynolds.

In an effort to educate the community about diversity, Francisco worked with Jean Horowitz and Father Beahan to create the Panel of Americans in 1963-65 visiting PTA groups. He was an early advocate with the Grand Rapids Public Schools for bilingual education for all children. As Francisco became a public speaker, he meticulously prepared his speeches, recording them on a reel to reel on his stereo system to practice.





In 1968, Francisco became involved in the movement of the United Farm Workers strike against growers and teamsters by encouraging stores throughout the country to boycott and not buy California lettuce and grapes. He met Cesar Chavez in Chicago at one point assisting him in his transportation.

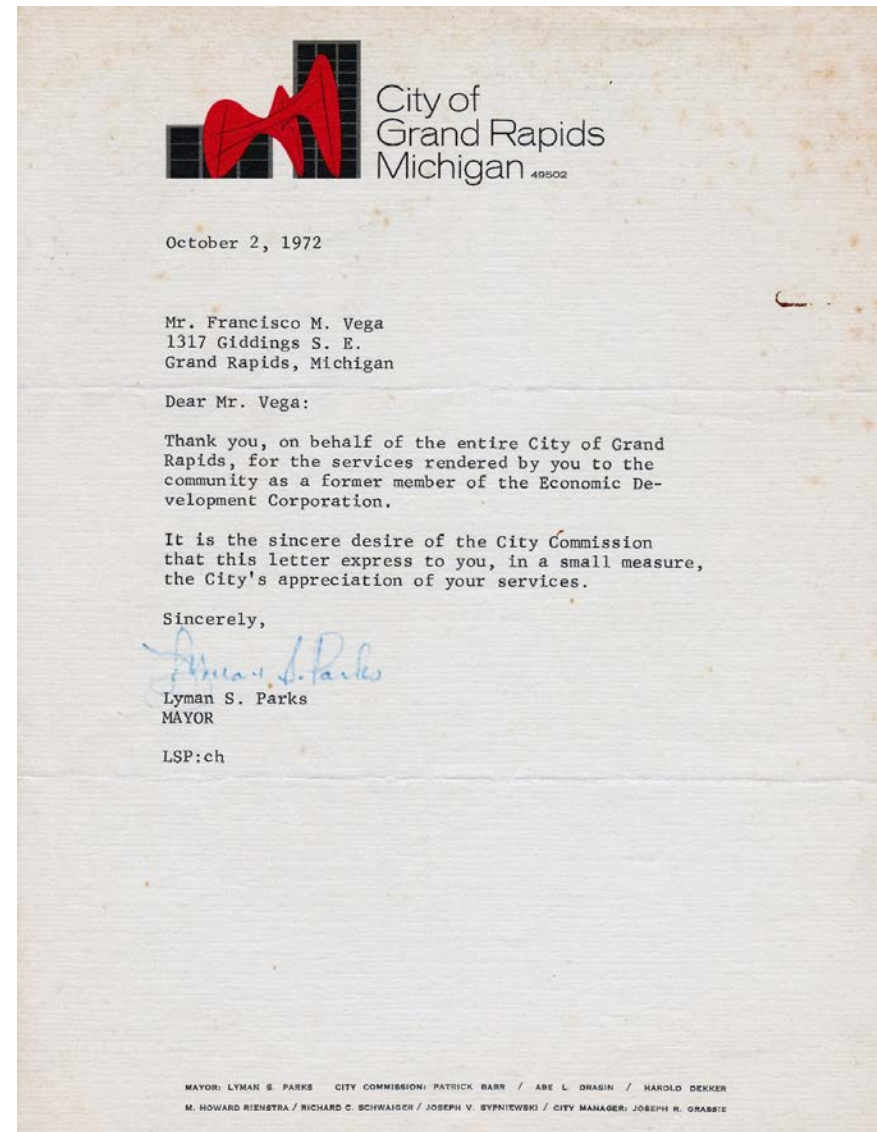


In 1969, Francisco initiated the first festival embracing the culture of Mexico in Grand Rapids that began at St. Andrew's Cathedral. It marched through downtown Grand Rapids to the Calder that was installed earlier that year. He supported Nancy Mulnix, an arts advocate, to commission The Grande Vitesse by Alexander Calder as part of the urban renewal plan to energize the community. After sending to France for the original plans, Francisco worked with Keeler Brass to install the small bronze sculpture with a Braille inscription in the Calder Plaza.



Good friend, Porfirio Murillo Pancho loved music and celebrations. He could often be found singing.





Member of the  
Economic  
Development  
Corporation

Francisco believed that if people experienced other cultures, they would embrace diversity. The vision of the festival was for the community to understand and celebrate the cultural traditions of Mexico.



With Governor William Milliken in Lansing serving as advisor on the business and bi lingual educational needs of Latinos in Michigan





As the State Chairman of the Republican National Hispanic Assembly, Francisco is campaigning for the Latino vote for President Ford



Francisco as delegate,  
advisor and leader in  
local and national politics.  
Always with the voice of  
education; bringing  
awareness to diversity





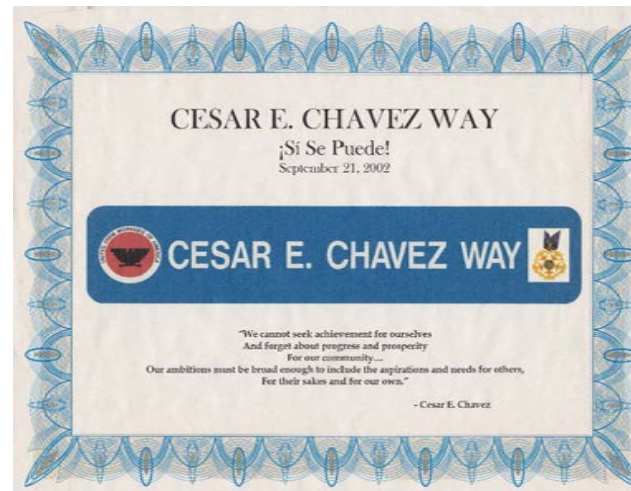
Francisco believed we can all make a difference." If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem."



A strong campaign supporter of Ben Fernandez for President



With Dr. Juan Olivarez and Lupe Ramos-Montigny





NATIONAL HISPANIC SCHOLARSHIP FUND  
INTERIM HEADQUARTERS OFFICE  
P.O. BOX 571  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94101  
415-992-9971

March 11, 1977

Mr. Francisco M. Vega  
1317 Giddings, S.E.  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49615

Dear Mr. Vega:

Almost three years ago, you were one of the persons who met in San Antonio, Texas to organize the National Hispanic Scholarship Fund.

Today, we are pleased to share with you the satisfaction of taking an idea and turning it into an action that has resulted in the enclosed list of 1976 NHSF recipients. Had it not been for your initial interest and promotion of this national concept, none of this would have been possible.

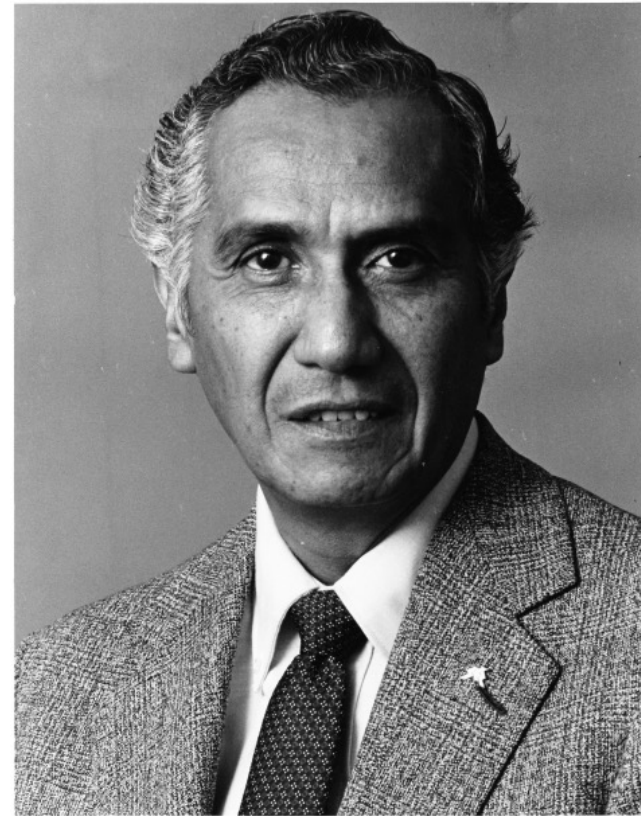
With deep appreciation, we want to thank you again for your past and present support.

Sincerely,

Ernest A. Robles  
Executive Director

EZR:dr

Enclosures



In 1975, Francisco was one of the founders of the National Hispanic Scholarship Fund, now the largest Hispanic foundation for scholarship in the country. He is wearing his SER Jobs for Progress pin, a national organization that elected him as a board member in Dallas, Texas



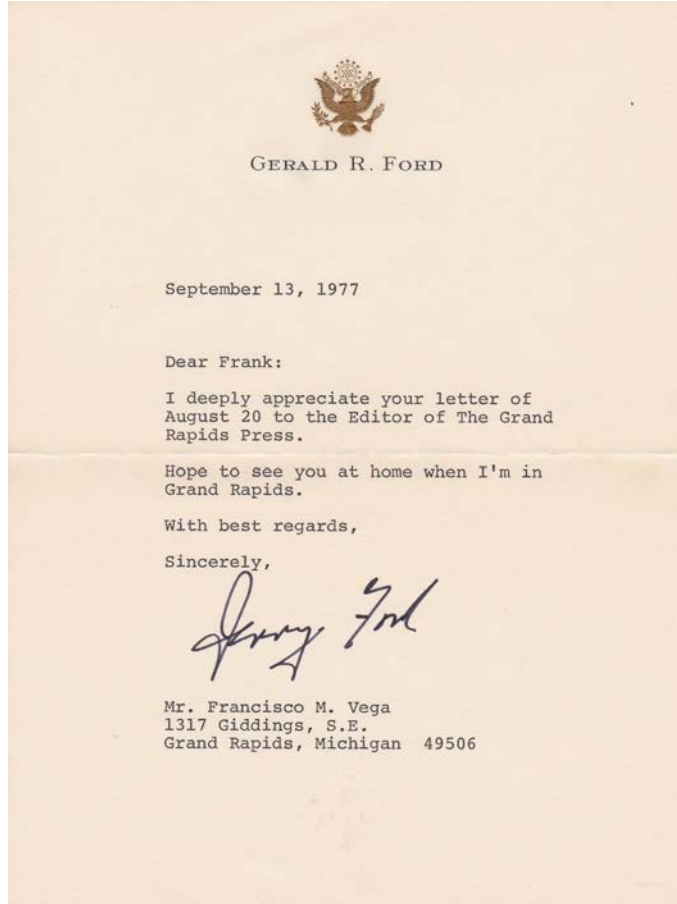


To Frank Vega  
With appreciation and best wishes,

*Jerry R. Ford*



In the oval office sitting across from President Jerry Ford, and Henry Kissinger, Francisco served as a leader and advisor of the Latino people and spoke as founder of the National Hispanic Scholarship Fund



At the White House



Back in Grand Rapids





Opening of the SER Jobs for Progress with the  
US Department of Labor, in Laredo, Texas



November 6, 1980

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MEMBER

Mr. Francisco M. Vega  
Member Board of Directors  
SER-Jobs for Progress, Inc.  
7101 Clyde Park Avenue, S. W.  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49509

Dear Francisco:

I wanted to let you know that the enclosed press release, announcing your recent election to the National Board, and photograph were sent to newspapers in Grand Rapids and the surrounding mid-west region.

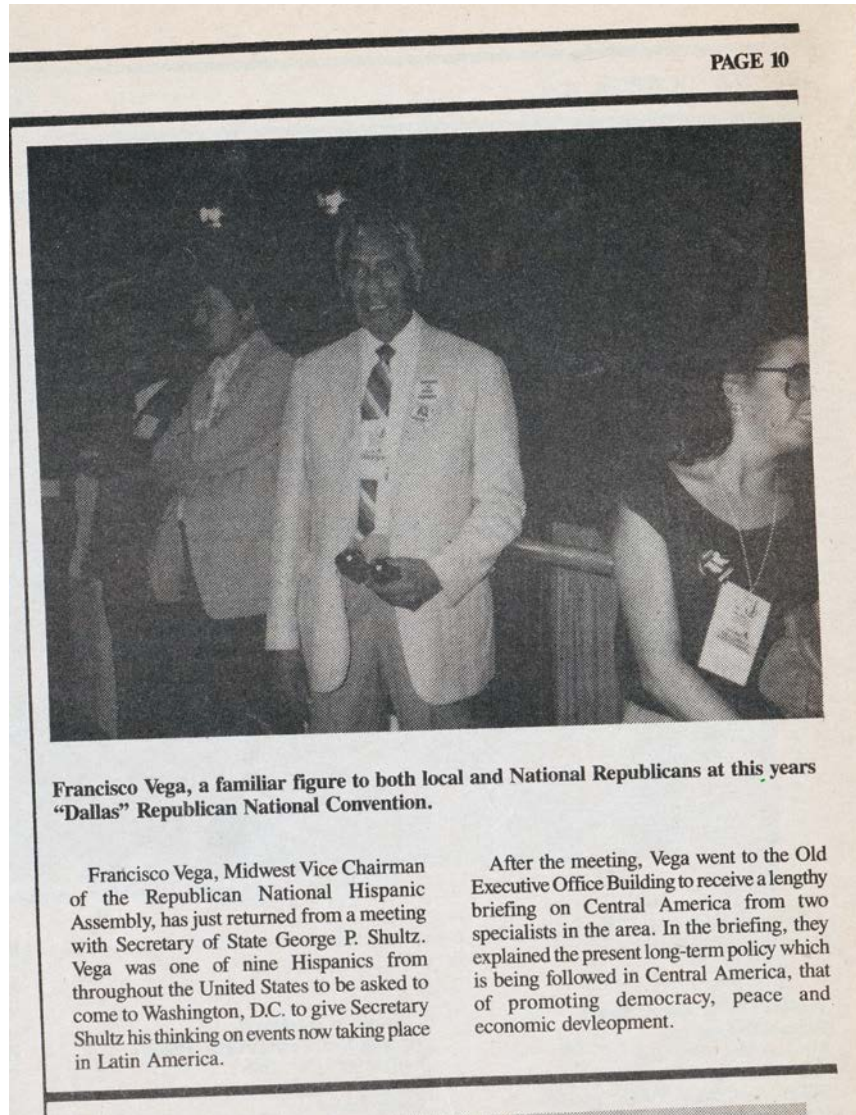
I have enjoyed working with you this year, and I sincerely look forward to another productive year with the entire Board of Directors. Mil gracias por todo.

Sinceramente,

*Pedro Ruiz Garza*  
Pedro Ruiz Garza  
National Director

/mf

Enclosures



Francisco elected as Midwest Vice Chairman of the Republican National Assembly, and was asked to go to Washington as one of nine Hispanics throughout the US advising Secretary of State George Schultz on events taking place in Latin America. He was also working with Prime Minister Price of British Honduras (Belize) on business opportunities.

Francisco believed in the right and responsibility to vote. He was very active throughout his life in getting the Latino community to register and out to vote





*To Francisco Vega  
With best wishes, Ronald Reagan*  
Francisco in the oval office with President Reagan



In the oval office as advisor on affairs in Latin America



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 28, 1990

Dear Mr. Vega:

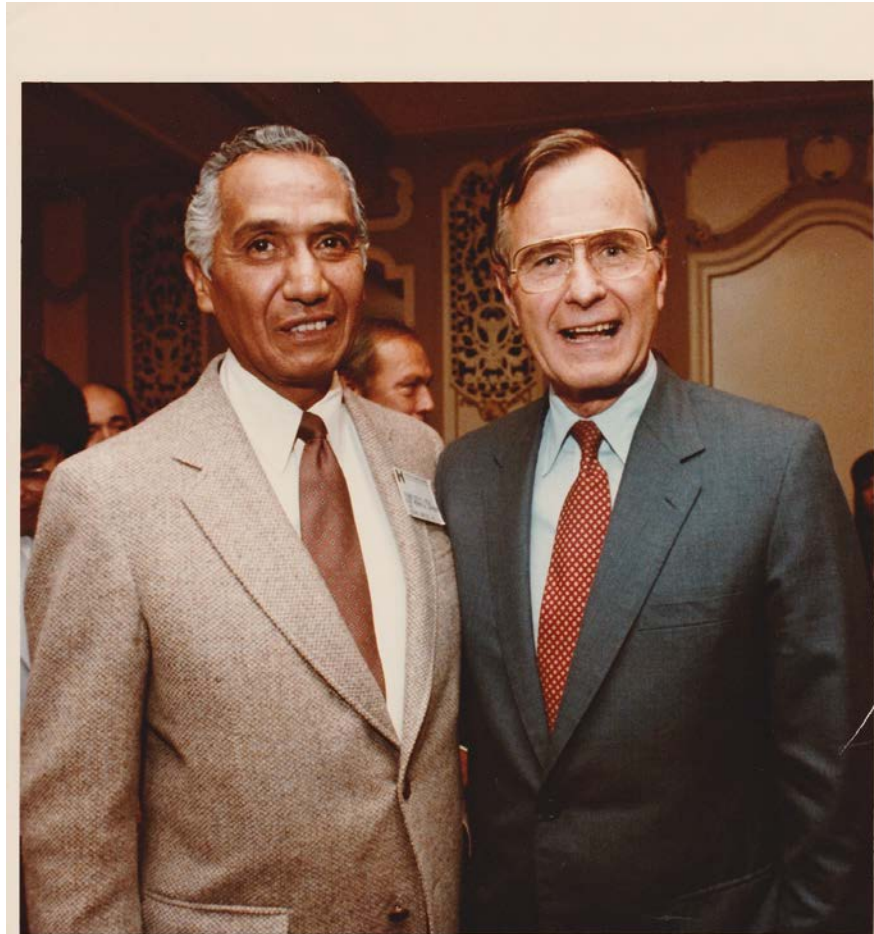
Thank you for your warm and thoughtful message. The accomplishments of the first year of my Administration have been very gratifying to me and give me great hope for the future. Your support means so much as we work together to fulfill our dreams for a better America and to pursue our hopes for a world of freedom and peace.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

*Geo Bush*

Mr. Francisco M. Vega  
National Committeeman for Michigan  
Republican National Hispanic Assembly  
1317 Giddings, SE.  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506



*To Francisco Vega  
With best wishes*

*Geo Bush*



## An Advocate for the Hispanic People



Chair of the Ethnic Heritage Celebration, 15 years on the Kent County Department of Social Services Board, Millennium Park Board, helped found the Latin American Council, the Hispanic Center....

Resume of Francisco Miguel Nava Vega - Lopez Tapia December 1, 2019 Telephone: (616) 245 - 5924

**JOIN THE ETHNIC HERITAGE CELEBRATION GALLERY**

HONORING  
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HONORARY CHAIRMAN  
**FRED MEIJER**

**VAN ANDEL MUSEUM CENTER**  
272 PEARL STREET NW  
GRAND RAPIDS

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1996**  
7:30 - 11:00 P.M.  
ETHNIC FOOD TASTING  
CASH BAR

**AUTHENTIC ETHNIC ATTIRE OR SEMI-FORMAL**

PROCEEDS WILL BE USED TO FUND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUSEUM'S  
**ETHNIC HERITAGE GALLERY**  
TO OPEN IN THE YEAR 2000

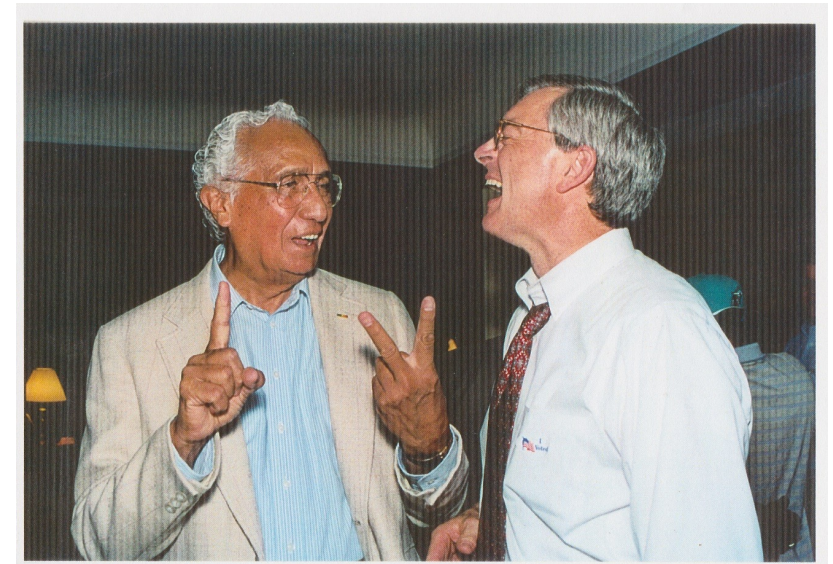
**PATRON TICKETS**  
\$1000, \$500, \$250, \$100  
OR  
**GENERAL ADMISSION**  
\$25

PLEASE RSVP BY OCTOBER 23

**Steering Committee**  
**Chairman, Francisco M. Vega**  
Steve Bernard  
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Josh Austin • Thomas Bobo  
David Brewer • Eva Aguirre Cooper  
Bluma Herman • Rebecca Hernandez  
Amy Hess • Abby Heugel • Nate Kuuma  
My Lien • Jessie McKey • Katie Mead  
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Amber Shantha • Jennifer Slinger • Beth Strobebridge  
Lindsay Strobebridge • Lea M. Tobar • Kerstin Trowbridge  
Susana Villarreal • Erika Young • Benjamin Zomberg

**Public Museum of Grand Rapids**



Supporting the election of Mayor George Heartwell, his son by love, in 2004







Francisco brought many leaders to Grand Rapids to celebrate history and diversity, including Dolores Huerta, the President of Mexico: Vicente Fox, And Coretta Scott King





Francisco continued to work on ideas and projects into the last days of his life. He received many awards over the years. He often referred to the story of the eagle on the Mexican flag, or one of his favorite Pancho sayings: “Eagles don’t hunt flies”, never losing site of what it takes to be a leader and always toasting life with his “two to one” Manhattan along the way.



**Francisco Miguel Nava Vega Lopez Tapia Scholarship**  
Aquinas College

Please see Fernando at our table to pick up information or make a donation today to provide opportunity for a future Latino/a student interested in business and community leadership

