

## San Antonio Express-News (TX)

June 26, 2017

### Connections via history; Von Ormy heritage event aims to bind community

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VON ORMY- In the parking lot of Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church, **Ramon Vasquez** was surprised to find someone he's been looking for.

"Today, I got to meet the son of the man who killed my great-uncle," said **Vasquez**. "When he said his name, I said, 'I think I know a little more about you than you think.'"

**Vasquez**, the executive director of American Indians of Texas, or AIT, had struck up a conversation with Henry de Leon, who also was trying to park Sunday morning. De Leon's father, of the same name, killed **Vasquez's** great-uncle and his two sons in 1943, for reasons still disputed.

Interactions like these were actually bound to happen at this church on this Sunday morning - and that was the intention. For the second year in a row, the church hosted a citywide cultural heritage event, where locals, current and former, could showcase their ancestors' names and belongings in hopes of making connections with others.

The church partnered with AIT, Northwest Vista College and Alamo Press about two years ago when the nonprofit and the community college embarked on the Texas Cultural Heritage Project in light of San Antonio's tricentennial celebration.

The goal of the project is to gather a more holistic story about the founding of San Antonio, one that includes native indigenous people. Members of the partnership are looking in towns on the outskirts of San Antonio, where many of the descendants of people who played important roles in San Antonio history often get overlooked, said Rudy De La Cruz, a government teacher at Northwest Vista College.

"I knew there would be families in the outskirts of San Antonio that'd be left out if we didn't find them," **Vasquez** said.

**Vasquez** and De La Cruz already have visited numerous small towns in San Antonio's outskirts, and still plan to visit more in coming months.

"We're here to gather the stories that go beyond the typical Alamo story," De La Cruz said. "We want a regional history so we can define ourselves, instead of them defining us."

In fairs like the one at Von Ormy, De La Cruz will ask to borrow or scan in artifacts brought by locals, to be displayed at Northwest Vista College's new Multicultural Center, which will open in fall.

"They say that 95 percent of history is in people's private collections. And we're finding it," **Vasquez** said.

De La Cruz said they're also holding one-on-one interviews with people in their homes to learn about their ancestors' contributions to the city and to Texas. Some of their findings will also likely be included at the Institute of Texan Cultures exhibit for the tricentennial year, De La Cruz said.

About an hour before 11 a.m. Mass, residents began shuffling onto church grounds carrying large bags of family portraits and memorabilia. In stands, they organized their materials for perusal and spoke with other residents about events and people from long ago.

"This is all just to get to know each other more," said Mary Castro, a volunteer at the church who organized the event. She said she has lived in Von Ormy since she was 28 days old. "It's crazy how much we're all connected."

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