

Calistoga News

Giving back to community part of Lopez family's heritage

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The four Lopez sisters – Irais, Indira, Wendy and Pilar, as well as niece Paulina – are leaving their marks in the City of Calistoga. Since moving to Calistoga, the Lopez women have contributed their share of services to the City.

Last year, Irais, 50, ran for City Council in an effort to become a representative for the Latino community in Calistoga, as well as show more attention to the senior community, and was appointed in February 2013.

She founded Casa de la Cultura, a program that offered culturally relevant activities to Latino children such as ballet folklórico, guitar, poetry and drama lessons. It's goal was to promote a better understanding of the differences and comparisons among cultures in the Upper Valley.

"I have taken advantage of every opportunity that this country has to offer to the immigrant community, and I feel like it is my responsibility to offer others my support in order to succeed," Irais said.

Indira, 46, was elected to the Calistoga Joint Unified School District board in November of 2010 and has now served on the Board for three years. Being an educator, she became interested in the school system when she discovered the Latino student



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The Lopez Family: Wendy, mother Estela Ortega, Indira, adopted brother Juan Carlos Rodriguez, Pilar and Irais.

population was growing rapidly at CJUSD.

"I realized that there was no Latino representative at the school board level that could help educate the Board about the complexities of the immigrant experience," Indira said. "I saw myself as a bridge and a resource to connect our main ethnic groups."

As well as being part of the school board, Indira is involved in several community projects and sits on other Boards. She is a former member of the City of Calistoga Community Resources Committee and Casa de la Cultura Committee, and currently serves on the Napa Community Founda-

tion Grants Committee. She was also a Board member of Hearts and Hands Preschool, and beginning this month she will join the board of Napa County Clinic Ole.

Wendy, 35, says her primary focus is on working with families and children. When she first moved to Calistoga in 2000, Wendy worked for Community Resources for Children and a few years later worked at the Calistoga Family Center. She currently works as the PDI Surgery Center case manager and community outreach coordinator for the Napa County.

The PDI is a non-profit dental surgery center in correlation with

Clinic Ole that provides specialized sedation dentistry for children that suffer from severe tooth decay. It was recently awarded \$57,000 by Auction Napa Valley to fund treatments, transportation assistance, dental screenings and to help educate families about oral health.

Like Indira, Wendy previously served on the board of the St. Lukes Preschool. She has also acted as president of the English Learners Advisory Council. Today Wendy volunteers for CAH as an interpreter, is a member of the Measure A Citizens Oversight Committee and Napa Promoters, and beginning this month she will be a board member of the Boys and Girls Club of St. Helena and Calistoga.

Paulina, 18, is a senior at Calistoga High School and has served on the school board as the student representative for the last five months alongside her aunt Indira. She became interested in participating when she decided she didn't want to be the average student, but take it a step further and become a leader among the students.

"The part that I'm most interested in about the school board is that I get to learn more about the decisions that are made for the better of our school and the student body," Paulina said.

After graduation, Paulina plans to attend Humboldt State University and study food sciences and sociology. Although she is currently focused on her education, she will continue to get involved every chance she gets as well as keep herself updated on what's happening in the community.



Paulina Lopez

Pilar runs a child day care outside of Calistoga.

The Lopez sisters agree that their passion for participating and contributing is no coincidence. It stems from their family's background in social and political affairs in their native state of Oaxaca, Mexico. Their grandfather served two terms in the State Legislature and more recently their aunt Yolanda became a Congresswoman. Their uncles and brothers have also held different positions in government.

Because public service has been in their environment since growing up, it is not new to them.

"Living in Calistoga where so many citizens care, and are involved in so many organizations, just makes it more easy and natural," Wendy said.



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