DIEZ Y SEIS DE SEPTIEMBRE

SPEECH FOR

JOSE CUEVAS

Hello everyone and Feliz Diez y Seis di Septiembre (**Is this what you would say to celebrate the holiday? If not, please use correct term-and forgive my Spanish**) to all of you! I want to thank you, Lubbock Chamber of Commerce, for inviting me to speak to all of you today at this year’s Fiesta Luncheon. (**If there are any people in particular you would like to thank, do so here**). In particular, I would like to thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, who\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for his contribution to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and of course \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, for organizing such a wonderful event.

I stand before you as a proud and humble Mexican American (**would you rather say American of Mexican descent?**). I often think of the struggles that we as a culture and as individuals have endured, and I am inspired by the “grito” that signals to all people, “I am ready to be free, I am ready to be able to sustain myself and my family, and I am ready to make **MY** mark on this world.” We all have learned of the stories of struggles of all of those who came before us-whether it was our Mexican forebears who declared their independence from Spain or those who struggled to assert themselves in the war for American independence, one thing ties each one of us together and that is **the will** to survive, the perseverance to persist on one’s mission, and the ability to envision, sustain and appreciate the opportunity to live a life of one’s own choosing. Although that is not always so easy, where there’s life there’s hope, and it is up to each one of us to clear the path and lead the way as we guide others to find the roads that lead to their own personal success and fulfillment in life.

The Mexican poet Octavio Paz said very simply, “Deserve your dream.” I had a dream when I was young, and that dream has brought and does bring me more joy, inspiration and fulfillment than I could have ever expected. Someone once said, “Revenge is a dish best served cold.” I personally prefer to dwell on the positive, so I would like to rephrase that and say, “Success is a burrito best served hot.” (**Wait for the laugh**). I remember the defining moment like it was yesterday. It was my first day of sixth grade and my new teacher was in the middle of calling the roll. As it came time to call my name, she made several unsuccessful attempts to pronounce my name-which by the way is **NOT** that complicated, and as her exasperation got the better of her, she just blurted out, “Why can’t you Mexicans have regular American names?” All of the Anglo kids in the class burst out into laughter, and I can tell you, that was the first and last time I allowed myself to feel so small. I vowed to myself that someday I was going to be somebody, and **NO ONE** would ever have that effect on me again. Others may shrink from incidents like that and allow those small minded people to get the better of them, but that was not who I was. I’ve kept that experience very close to my heart and it has fueled my determination for my whole life, and I regard it as one of the best gifts I have ever received. In turn, I use it to drive my life and to share with anyone who will listen, that **NO ONE** can keep **YOU** down unless you **ALLOW** yourself to be a victim.

When I was in high school and 15 years old, I got my very first job as a dishwasher in a restaurant. I was one of eight children and believe me, we didn’t have that much. I watched the patrons of that restaurant enjoy what seemed to me to be rather grand meals, and as I cleaned those plates free of left over lobster and steak, I knew my destiny would be to have my own restaurant someday. I pursued my dream by learning all about the restaurant business from a very practical point of view-first as that dishwasher, then as a waiter, where I met my wonderful wife Diane, and then as a young and dynamic duo, Diane and I had the dream to open our own restaurant, one that would celebrate Mexican heritage and cuisine. Diane and I were young and naïve, but we were also open to the challenge and we were receptive to learning every step needed to run a business. Now that I think of it, I suppose I’ve been blessed with quite a bit of determination!! Before the saying became part of our common language, I did what I could to “think outside the box.” We bought restaurant equipment from the neighborhood pharmacy that was going out of business, I negotiated the rental of 600 square feet of a building my father had, and before you knew it, Diane and I were in business!! Jumburrito was built, literally, on a dollar-or a few, a dream, and a lot of hard work. I learned many priceless lessons as we built our business, and I wouldn’t trade any of the hard knocks for anything-they have been my best teachers.

Although we made plenty of mistakes along the way-like what’s a Mexican restaurant that can’t keep up with tortilla demand? … Each misstep proved to push us to higher levels of performance, appreciation and success. Opportunity was knocking and we did what we had to in order to insure that we opened as many doors as possible. Looking back at those early days of trial, error and creative problem solving, I suppose in some way, we were pioneers in the concept of outsourcing. Our restaurant became really popular, but maintaining and growing a business in a small space became challenging. There was a time when we could not maintain our supply of tortillas. Some people go into business and run out of “**dough**.” I suppose the same happened with us. We tried to appease our loyal customers who would wait in line until we got the requisite tortillas made, but we knew we had to come up with a better plan. In an effort to support both “outsourcing” and “cottage industry,” we came up with a simple solution…canvas the neighborhood, knock on doors, find women at home who would be able to make tortillas for us, and have a win-win situation. Ladies and gentlemen, it is that kind of hidden opportunity that really illustrates “the secret of life.” Very simply, I know that I cannot succeed if my neighbor doesn’t succeed. We had a need, we found suppliers, we supported the community. It is now thirty years later and we have six restaurants with plans for more, we provide jobs for over 160 people, we encourage our employees to take ownership and responsibility for the jobs they do, and our business is on target to gross upwards of $9.5 million a year. We are thankful for all the support and patronage we have built up over the years. We are proud to be able to provide so many people with the opportunities to make their own successes, and we are inspired by those people out there who realize that getting a “hand up” as opposed to a “hand out” is what truly makes the most critical difference in this world. We work to allow others to work and to feel the pride of ownership and self-respect that comes with being able to be self-sustained.

As we work on the steps to support future growth in our businesses in areas like franchising, we cannot help but to think of the contribution that is made to our community and ultimately our economy. There’s an old Chinese proverb that states, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. **Teach** a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” We believe in pride of hands on ownership and the satisfaction that comes with knowing that you are responsible for your well-being and that accomplishment inspires others around you. To that end, I encourage active participation of franchisees in their businesses. We also believe in diversity and in celebrating and playing to peoples’ strengths. Productivity and employee retention are greatly and positively affected when people are treated with dignity and respect, and everyone wants to be acknowledged for a job well done.

Very often, I think of that sixth grade teacher and I think of my classmates who laughed at the challenge of pronouncing my seemingly foreign sounding last name, but I also have to be thankful to my parents who instilled in me the will to conquer the challenges I faced. At one time or another, each one of us will be challenged with seemingly insurmountable situations, but we have to remember that no matter what, as human beings we have been blessed with the capability to exercise a strong and fierce determination-in **positive** ways. To the people who told me early on in my career that I would not succeed, I say, “Thank you…have you met my sixth grade teacher?” (**Wait for the laugh**). No really, I kid, but remember what I said earlier- incidents like those were my best teachers, and it is up to us to take those lessons and seemingly negative situations, make a big pitcher of Mexican lemonade, and share it with those around you-In fact, I might put it on the menu!! (**Just in case you didn’t know, one recipe is lemonade, cilantro and a little bit of chopped jalapenos-it might be fun to give them the recipe-it might also be fun to have some available at the luncheon to toast to the holiday-there is also “dirty Mexican lemonade” which consists of lemonade, Sprite and Vodka, but I don’t know if you want to discuss alcoholic beverages at this event**).

Today we celebrate Mexican independence, Mexican heritage and the intention that Mexican culture and history will continue to inspire and retain its rightful place of recognition and influence in our ever changing and diversified world. Whereas it is true that the world is getting smaller and smaller, as technology advances, information and news spread at unprecedented speed, and societies and traditions comingle, it will be the strength of character, perseverance and pride that will sustain all of us of Mexican descent and heritage well into the future. The colors of the Mexican flag represent Hope, Union and honoring the Blood spent by its heroes in the pursuit of lasting independence. The eagle at its center represents triumph of good over evil and symbolizes the strength of the Mexican people. Ultimately, I would have to say that if I were to have a personal flag to symbolize my purpose in life, my flag would also bear 3 sections, and those sections would represent **passion**, or belief in one’s dreams, hard work, or **action**, and community service, which to me represents **responsibility**.

I have worked for my entire adult life to build and maintain a business that provides an arena for me to fulfill my purpose in life. With the passion to believe in my dreams, the action to do the necessary work, and the responsibility to give back to our community, I use my work and my business to support the future of our next generations. It is my intention that my actions and civic involvement work to provide improved conditions for our neighbors and ultimately, the state of Texas and our country. As Chairman of the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, I work to manage that agency in its critical job of being responsible for all licensing and enforcement of Texas Liquor Laws. In my work as President of Midland County Fresh Water Supply District 1, we are responsible for the construction and development of a 200 million dollar water project. I am living proof that the more you do, the more you **CAN** do. As I mentioned earlier, even though the global trend is towards living an “easier” life thanks to the technological advances and conveniences we share in modern times, I think we can all agree that in a lot of respects, survival is getting more challenging. We as adults have the responsibility to prepare our youth for the future, and young people have to be more prepared than ever to cope in an ever increasingly competitive environment. They have to be well nourished, well educated, and given the essential tools and skills that are required for survival and independence now and into the future. They have to be proud of who they are, believe in themselves, they must celebrate their diverse cultural backgrounds, and they have to learn to **earn** their independence and their place and role in the future. It has been very fulfilling for me to be able to provide jobs and opportunities for so many people, and I welcome all of you to do the same, at whatever level you can. I want to thank you all for expressing interest in hearing what I have to say, and for supporting our businesses and civic commitments. I wish all of you much success and positive growth in the future, and may we all meet again at the next Diez y Seis di Septiembre and celebrate our accomplishments and our wonderful community spirit.

Thank you all!