



## Robert Rios

### Centro Cultural de Washington County, Cornelius, Oregon

#### Encore Fellow 2016



*“The Fellowship gave me a greater sense of purpose because I was impacting the community in a very positive way...—it changes the way you look at things.” Robert Rios, 2016 Encore Fellow*

After 21 years in human resources and operations, Robert opted to take early retirement after 21 years at Intel. When he found out about Encore Fellowships, he realized that it might be a good fit for him. “I was born in Mexico and raised in a very Hispanic community, but I had never worked to help my community, my culture.”

After a long search he identified Centro Cultural as a social impact organization that might need someone with his facilities and operations experience. Centro Cultural provides youth and adult educational services, programs for seniors, and health services to assure the Latino community is self-sufficient, engaged and productive members of the community. Robert set up a meeting with Centro’s Executive Director and she found that he would be a perfect fit for the long list of work they needed done. He began his Fellowship as Director of Operations in July 2016.

The Executive and Assistant Directors were in the midst of restructuring the organization when Robert stepped in. His role became clear immediately: he would oversee the entire campus facility of Centro Cultural. He assessed every aspect of the facility and discovered that many of

the organization's processes needed reorganization and there were numerous facility repairs to be made.

"We needed to do things differently...so we could be more efficient and consistent." Everything had to be brought up to code and policies and safety procedures had to be written. A major focus of Robert's work was to bring the kitchen up to code and repair it to be a working industrial kitchen that would allow Centro to expand and offer the community more opportunities to gather. After two months at Centro, Robert realized that there was so much work to be done that he got permission to bump his work schedule to 40 hours a week for the rest of his Fellowship instead of the usual 20 hours a week over a year. Working intensely for that period of time allowed him to get the facility in good operating condition.

"At Intel, you could get the resources you needed if you had a good enough justification...Here [Centro], I could justify everything but there weren't any resources...I had to be really creative." Robert found volunteers to help who had the skill set he needed. Other community members were willing to donate money or equipment to make the changes he knew were needed. With Robert's guidance and expertise, the community came together to help strengthen the resource they knew and loved as Centro Cultural.

To find funding, "I learned the process of how to apply for a County Development Block Grant to do facility work repairs here...I had to do the whole presentation in front of the Advisory Board and City Council. That was a new experience for me...Fortunately my presentation skills from working with Intel were already there. Out of eight organizations competing for the grant, three received the funds and Centro was one of them."

Getting the health-inspected, industrial kitchen up to speed allowed Centro to bring the Meals on Wheels Program there to feed and entertain seniors every Friday. Centro was also now able to gain more recurring revenues by renting the kitchen out to small start-up businesses and restaurants for several hours a week. They could now rent their hall for outside events of up to 100 people.

Robert was continually impressed with the care that each staff member put forth to help the clients who came through the door each day. He came to the realization that he could easily take on a new career at Centro. At the close of his fellowship, Robert was invited and agreed to stay on full-time as Director of Operations. The Fellowship provided Robert a unique opportunity to move from the for-profit world to the "heartfelt" work of a nonprofit.