

Tomasa Castillo, 2017 Cinco de Mayo West Side Saint Paul Grand Marshal

Tomasa Castillo came to the West Side of Saint Paul 71 years ago, at the age of 26 years old with her husband, Nicolas Castillo Sr after his term in the military. A widow for 33 years, she has 6 children, 19 grandchildren, 48 great grandchildren, and 14 great great grandchildren! Tomasa is 98 years old and still lives independently on the West Side. She has been a lifelong member of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Tomasa has had a huge impact on the West Side community. She is the one of the founders of La Clinica in 1971, La Clinica originally offered free health services for the people of the West Side who couldn't speak English or afford health care. She organized doctors and nurses to volunteer their time and asked for donations of supplies. Since opening in 1971 La Clinica grown into a large health center today.

Additionally, Tomasa helped start the Chicano studies department at the University of Minnesota, which when opened in 1972 was the first Chicano studies department in the Upper Midwest and is still offered at the University today. Tomasa would also speak at different colleges about the Mexican American movement.

Tomasa always had her door opened to homeless people and offered meals to anyone who couldn't afford to eat. She welcomed Cesar Chavez into her home and they organized a protest to boycott the unfair treatment of migrant workers. Tomasa volunteered for schools on the West Side by instructing students how to crochet and make meals. Her husband played in a Mexican band and she used admission fees collected would be donated to underprivileged families. Tomasa worked at Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio or CLUES a non-profit service organization by Latinos for Latinos, helping seniors attend outings and activities.

After his death, Tomasa advocated with the City of Saint Paul for a park to be named after her husband, Nicolas Castillo Sr, now Parque Castillo. She recently marched alongside the West Side Boosters and community members to ask the city to fund the renovation of the park. This year, shortly after the 2017 Cinco de Mayo festival work will begin to renovate the park including new landscaping, walkways, equipment and a splash pad to create a vibrant space for the West Side community.