

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: http://www.venturacountystar.com/vcs/ox/article/0,1375,VCS_238_5392275,00.html

Woman lauded for activism

Work made her part of Johnson administration

By Charles Levin, clevin@VenturaCountyStar.com

March 3, 2007

In the 1930s, priests ventured into the remote prairie town of Hoehne, Colo., only once a month to say Mass. But that didn't stop Lupe Anguiano from absorbing her Roman Catholic faith.

In the absence of a cleric, Anguiano's mother gave the family religious instruction. Over time, those studies affirmed Anguiano's philosophy of helping those in need.

Now 78, Anguiano is reaping praise for a life spent advocating for the poor, empowering welfare clients and defending the environment.

On Monday, state lawmakers will recognize the Oxnard resident as the 35th Assembly District Woman of the Year. Last week, the Oxnard City Council offered similar kudos in a resolution. And this week, the Santa Rosa-based National Women's History Project acknowledged Anguiano along with 13 other honorees during its annual salute to Women's History Month.

The festivities also include opening the Lupe Anguiano Archives at UCLA on March 12. Gloria Steinem, the feminist icon and Anguiano's longtime friend, will deliver the keynote speech.

"I don't know," Anguiano said recently when asked about the flurry of attention. "I've just been at the right place at the right time."

Anguiano said no single event steered her toward a philosophy of service and activism — just her ongoing faith.

"Blessed are those who thirst for hunger and justice," Anguiano, a former nun, said, quoting Jesus Christ. "I think our Lord is asking me to deal with all the gifts he is giving me."

Assemblyman Pedro Nava, D-Santa Barbara, selected Anguiano for the annual state honor partly because of her opposition to a proposed offshore liquefied natural gas terminal.

From a family of farmworkers

Anguiano was born in La Junta, Colo., the fourth of six children. Her father, a descendant of Mexican Indians, worked for the railroad. The family lived in company housing. Summers were spent in Saticoy, Fillmore and San Jose, where the family picked fruit and walnuts.

"My father would say, 'All work is dignified,'" Anguiano said.

The family moved to Saticoy when she was in third grade. A year after graduating from high school, she joined a convent and earned several college degrees.

Fifteen years later, she left the convent, emboldened by Pope John XXIII's proclamation that "nuns and priests should stop hiding behind rectory walls and go out and serve the people," she said. "And boy, that was my ticket. That was my call to action."

She was also upset when the Archdiocese of Los Angeles ordered priests and nuns to stay out of the political fray over Proposition 14. Approved statewide by a 2-1 majority of voters, the 1964 initiative prevented state and local governments from enacting fair housing legislation. Real estate interests pushed the initiative, angered by a state law that banned racial discrimination at publicly funded apartments and homes.

Three years later, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the initiative as unconstitutional.

Off to Washington

Anguiano's devotion to ending poverty and creating employment took her to Washington, D.C., where she served in President Johnson's administration, and to Michigan, where she helped organize a grape boycott for Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers.

Steinem first learned of Anguiano when she was organizing welfare mothers in San Antonio around 1970. Anguiano's efforts to move women off welfare and into jobs took root in seven states, including California and ultimately Ventura County.

"I saw personally what a life force she is: impassioned, charismatic, well-informed and effective," Steinem wrote this week in an e-mail to The Star.

But her life in activism is not over. Beyond her front door, she sees a world in crisis. She called the Iraq war "senseless" and worries about genocide in Sudan.

Anguiano also is focused on stopping a proposal by BHP Billiton to build a floating liquefied natural gas terminal 13.8 miles off the coast of Oxnard. Like other opponents, Anguiano contends the project would pollute air and marine wildlife. She works closely with the Coastal Protection Network, run by Susan Jordan, Nava's wife.

"Even if you're not a believer, we have a responsibility to take a stance," Anguiano said of these issues. "The dignity of humankind is at stake here."