

MAX, Andrade has done voice work for GPS systems in high-end cars and for promotional videos for tourism in Belize, among other efforts. For his day job, he's a court certified Spanish interpreter for the Oregon Judicial Department.

He's also a regular actor at El Centro Milagro Theatre (or Miracle Theatre) in Southeast Portland. Andrade recently starred in *Ana en el Trópico (Anna in the Tropics)* and *Entre Villa y una Mujer Desnuda (Between Pancho Villa and a Naked Woman)*.

But some of his most meaningful work, he says, is done at the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) of Portland, a congregation that welcomes LGBTQ members.

"It's been the place where I've been able to reconcile my sexuality with my spirituality, and it continues to be a very enlightening journey," he says.

Andrade is now a regular volunteer at the church, but he first attended there with a heavy heart. After he turned 30, he was discouraged by the lack of options available to men who were no longer in the twentysomething gay limelight. With that milestone, he thought most gay men somehow disappeared.

"I felt called to MCC because I thought it would probably be a good place to learn how to die," he says. "I'm not saying it's a rational thought, but it was the initial thought."

Now, however, the voice of the MAX believes he has several important steps to make in his life.

"I found there is something to look forward to in my thirties. And my forties. And my fifties," Andrade says. "There is a process of growth."

—AARON SPENCER

Latina Firecracker

Vanessa La Torre walks the talk to help those in need

Vanessa La Torre, 30, can be a ball of energy. During Portland Pride, she promoted Latino Gay Pride so feverishly—dancing and talking all weekend—that she literally lost her voice. "This is my body's way of telling me I need to relax," she says a week later.

When La Torre can talk, she does it fast. She believes communication is vital to the LGBTQ Latino community, and she has a lot to say.

La Torre works for Cascade AIDS Project in the supportive services department, where she speaks with families who have members living with HIV. She helps people cope with any number of situations they may face.

She also volunteers with Latino Gay Pride and is a co-chair of the Chicas CelebrAcción, an event created to foster networking opportunities for LGBTQ Latinas in Portland.

In all of these roles, she emphasizes the role of community and its ability to encourage communication about important issues—especially ones surrounding sexual health. She has been working in the sexual health field for more than a decade.

A strong community is fundamental for individuals to make good decisions about sexual health, La Torre says. For the Latino population, family is key. That bond—the colloquial expression for it is "*familismo*," La Torre says—is what can help people when they're in crisis. The community forms the primary support network.

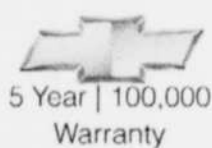
La Torre grew up in Southern California and says she knew



a lot of LGBTQ Latinos who weren't able to have open discussions with their families or the community in general. The stigma of being a sexual minority led some to sexual experimentation that would be risky, she says.

"People aren't talking about healthy sexuality, especially in the Latino community," La Torre says. Her work with CAP helps people learn to talk about healthy sexuality at different stages in life—conversations she says can help people overcome barriers and form communities of their own. **JO**

—AARON SPENCER

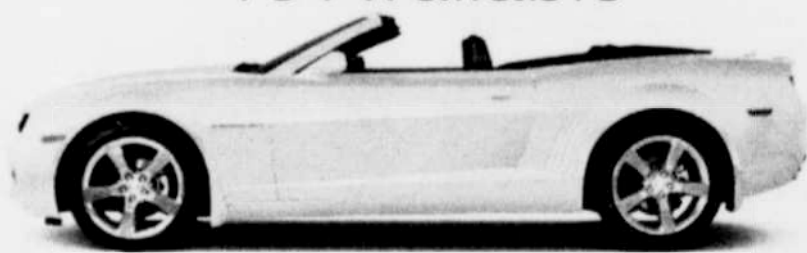


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