

METROPOLITAN

Centro Cultural serves Chicano community

by Catherine Seigner

Centro Cultural in Cornelius, Oregon, has won a \$5,000 grant from the United Church of Christ's Office for Church in Society to establish an Hispanic and Anglo women's arts and crafts cooperative through Centro's "Vecinas Unidas" project (Neighbor Women United). The project was one of nine funded of a total of 80 proposals and the only West Coast project funded.

Natasha Beck, 32, a community organizer and women's studies instructor, is coordinator of the project, which is headquartered at the distinctive Centro building along with the Petra Perez Senior Center, the Virginia Garcia Health Clinic across the street, and a branch of Oregon Human Development Corporation (a job training program for Spanish-speaking peoples).

The Centro is a non-profit organization formed about 10 years ago to serve the growing Spanish-speaking population of rural Washington County by providing social, medical and economic assistance. Along with the Vecinas Unidas project, it provides a place for low-income people to have a free lunch, to obtain health checkups and medical help, and perhaps most important, a gathering place to enjoy the company of other Spanish-speaking people.

The Office for Church in Society's goal of helping form coalitions of church women, low-income women, minority women and women's movement groups fits in well with the purpose of Vecinas Unidas, said Ms. Beck. Its name was originally chosen in formation meetings of the group's board members to reflect the "different types of women working together—low-income, Anglo and Latina, Church and community," she said.

The original grant proposal seeking funding for the project was written by Robin Aaberg of Hillsboro, who had worked earlier at Centro on a bilingual newsletter, *El Grip Del Barrio* ("Town Crier").

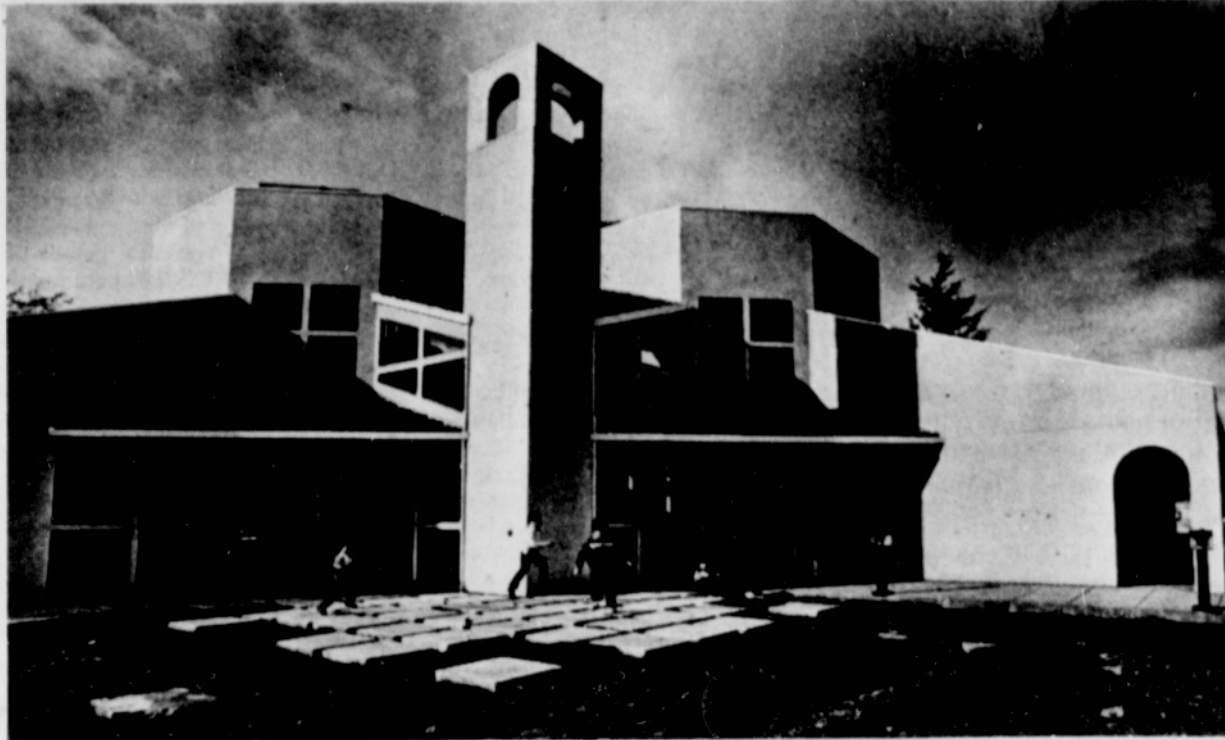
When the Church's grant came through, it was only half of the original \$10,000 proposal, said Ms. Beck, so she was hired half-time starting last July. Her first efforts were to put together a mailing list and telephone contact list of those Spanish-speaking women who might be interested in forming the arts and crafts cooperative. She works approximately 20 hours per week, with some assistance from a Pacific University student intern.

A local woman and law student, Enedelia Hernandez, helped with the contacts, but the project was waylaid by the big celebration September 17 of Mexican Independence Day. The women's project produced a leaflet and had a booth at the festival, however, and interests slowly started increasing.

Many of the potential co-op members were busy working as migrants in the summer. "That's traditionally a hard time to start new projects," Ms. Beck explained.

On October 8, Vecinas Unidas put together a gathering for women to contribute their ideas for the cooperative. "We plan to set up a co-op for each person to have a vote and a share, decide what to produce and to share the profits," Ms. Beck said. "Most interest was in sewing and embroidery work."

Ms. Beck acknowledges income from the project "probably won't be enough to support people," but looks for progress to be made in the women working together on a com-



Centro Cultural's distinctive building in Cornelius, Oregon, opened in February, 1983 and was made possible by \$600,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds. It houses the Vecinas

Unidas project: a Food Bank; the Petra Perez Senior Center, and a branch of Oregon Human Development Corporation.

(Photo: Michal Thompson)

mon goal.

Financial concerns are considerable among most Spanish-speaking people in Washington County, Beck noted. Many are migrant or cannery workers who may earn a good salary, but usually for only a limited time, leaving them without a steady income the rest of the year. Their average family income is well below the poverty level and the number in the family to support is often large (average family size is 4.74 persons). Many families are headed by a single parent and average education level is the sixth grade.

There are also cultural biases involved in getting a women's cooperative off the ground, Beck said, although this is mitigated somewhat by the fact that many of the women already work outside the home and that arts and crafts are very traditional aspects of so-called "women's work."

Ms. Beck is seeking additional funding for the time when the Church's "seed money" runs out—sometime in January, 1984. The financial problem is one the Centro has had for some time, she said, and although some money comes from United Way and other sources, solid funding for individual projects is difficult to obtain and often, worthwhile projects are competing for the same sources of money.

Even with the scarce resources, Ms. Beck finds her job rewarding and challenging because of the people she meets. "The people have been so warm and accepting. It helps to make up for the frustrations," she said. "I have felt a lot of respect from people."

For the future, she is thinking about resources available to the co-op such as the kiln and sewing machines sitting at Centro unused. "We could do pottery, for example; it's there to use. We just need to get people going on it. Starting sewing classes is another possibility."

Marketing is a challenge for traditional Hispanic arts because likely sales markets are in Portland, and "most people want to stay in the area and not go to Portland," Beck explained.

In the meantime, between organizing the local women and seeking additional funding, Ms. Beck is planning a Christmas show, planning ongoing board meetings for the co-op and getting the women to sell

Women's Heritage Calendars, as a "unique, multi-cultural gift" describing the contributions women have made to our collective history.

Ms. Beck has learned women's cooperative arts projects take time. She visited a Native American arts association in Warm Springs, Oregon, in September, and found that group had to go door-to-door to gain support and encouragement for

their work.

Now, however, the group (Artistas Indigena, a Pan American Women's Art Association for Social Change) has an ethnic art show currently on display in Portland until November 18 at Six Directions Gallery, 828 N.W. 23rd. It is titled "Grandmother Moon: Women's Vision Through Women's Hands," and runs through November 18th.

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Judge Deiz files re-election bid

Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Mercedes F. Deiz announced last Friday that she has filed for re-election to another term.

Judge Deiz has been on the Circuit Court since her election in January, 1973. She was re-elected in 1978.

From 1970 through 1972 Judge Deiz served on the Multnomah County District Court.

Judge Deiz has received numerous honors during her years on the bench, including service as a Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellow and Lecturer at the Harvard Law School. She currently is a Director of the National Center for State



MERCEDES DEIZ

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