



East Side Heroes  
Enrique Flores

Greetings Members of the Rotary eClub of the Southwest USA!  
My name is Enrique S. Flores and I am the founder and executive director for East Side Heroes. I truly admire that so many of the programs sponsored by Rotary focus on youth leadership and youth helping the community. I believe East Side Heroes will speak to the intention and hearts of Rotarians everywhere, and I thank you so very much for this opportunity to introduce you to East Side Heroes.

As an introduction to the nonprofit, please click on the link below to watch an interview from a local TV station:

<http://tinyurl.com/ESHonNBCBayArea>

The banquet mentioned took place this April, celebrating our students' achievements. It was the seventh annual celebration, and we were honored to have as our keynote speaker Father Gregory Boyle, a Jesuit Priest (and East Side Heroes Board Member) who founded Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, California. Over 200 community members were in attendance.

I should also tell you something of myself. I am the son of Mexican immigrants. My parents immigrated to this country for the same reasons that most people leave their homeland: they had

hopes of establishing a better quality of life for their children and future generations of their family.

I spent the first 26 years of my life growing up in the Story and King neighborhood of East San Jose. I am the product of the Alum Rock School District (K-8). In 10th grade, I received a



scholarship from the Jesuit Community, making it possible for me to receive a college prep education and graduate successfully from Bellarmine College Preparatory. After high school, I received financial assistance once again, this time from the "Tuition Remission" Program at Santa Clara University (my dad serves as a janitor for the university), thus making it possible for me to earn a Bachelors of Science Degree in Sociology (2001) and a Masters in Counseling with an emphasis in Correctional Psychology (2006), both from Santa Clara University.

I completed my first autobiographical book, From E.S.S.J. to S.C.U. and Back, at age 20, founded the East Side Heroes nonprofit at age 24, completed my masters degree at age 26, married at age 27, and am now working on my second manuscript. I currently work as a substance abuse/recovery teacher for Milpitas Adult Education at the Elmwood Correctional Facility.

## The Mission

The Mission of East Side Heroes is to improve the quality of life of at-risk youth, young adults, and low-income families. East Side

Heroes is multi-culturally inclusive and welcomes individuals of any race, age, gender, ethnicity, income level, beliefs, or sexual orientation by manner of offering lifelong mentorship, educational scholarships, and leadership skills development. East Side Heroes strives to mentor and mold the compassionate leaders of tomorrow by encouraging our mentees to develop and establish community improvement projects that meet the real needs of their surrounding community. East Side Heroes hopes to inspire mentees to one day mentor others, creating a cycle of compassionate mentors that will self-actualize our motto: Leaders Create Leaders.

East Side Heroes is currently fulfilling its Mission by

1. meeting the needs of students and families who are desperately seeking academic scholarships to achieve career dreams, and empower individuals to break the cycle of poverty within their families;
2. providing mentorship to youth and young adults who have lost hope in their future and are in need of emotional restoration; and
3. influencing and inspiring other nonprofits, such as the YWCA of Silicon Valley, to implement unique community service projects founded by East Side Heroes, such as the collection and distribution of knit-caps and warm socks to homeless day workers, as well as preparing and distributing bag lunches to hungry day workers. As a result, over 400 "Project Inspire" high school students in East San Jose have planned and effectively implemented dozens more community improvement projects this school year, as a result of the East Side Heroes mentoring intervention.

## Achievements

As a volunteer-run nonprofit organization, East Side Heroes has raised over \$180,000 in the past seven years. It is important to

note that 98% of all funds raised goes directly to the students via mentorship or scholarships. Only 2% is used for our website, post office box, insurance, and tax consultant. As a result, East Side Heroes has been able to provide scholarship aid to ten students, including the four below. There are additional students currently on our waitlist.

1. Karen Ortiz -- Notre Dame HS, San Jose, CA (Class of 2008)  
-- Currently at Cal State University, East Bay - 3.5 GPA
2. Sarita Zuniga -- Notre Dame HS, San Jose, CA (Class of 2009) -- Currently at University of San Francisco – 3.8 GPA
3. Ana Plascencia-- Archbishop Mitty HS, San Jose, CA (Class of 2010) -- Attending Boston University in the Fall. – 4.1 GPA
4. Alma Acosta-- Notre Dame HS, San Jose, CA (Class of 2010)  
-- Attending Santa Clara University in the Fall - 4.0 GPA

When I first met Ana Plascencia, (as an 8th grade student), I was truly worried about her. Ana was on the fast track to end up as a stereotypical statistic, which is the story of too many young Latinas. Ana's peer group dressed the same, talked the same, and thought the same. I feared Ana would soon fall in love with an active gang member, become pregnant, get hooked on drugs and alcohol, lose faith in the value of school, and settle for a minimum-wage job.

When I first met Alma Acosta (as an 8th grade student), I noticed a lonely, introverted girl who had big dreams for herself. I saw hope in her eyes - hope of being the first person in her family to graduate from college in order to help her family rise out of low-income status, help her community, and be the trail-blazing pioneer for her two younger sisters.

Ana and Alma's parents reminded me of my own parents. They had no idea how to navigate the process of applying to a college

prep high school and filling out financial aid forms, but what they did know is that they would do whatever it takes to help their children "make it" in life. Immigrant parents, like Alma and Ana and mine as well, have a common belief: "The best inheritance we can leave our children is a good education."

For nobody can ever take away a college education. A college degree never decreases in value, and a quality education always gives back to you and others.

This month, both Ana and Alma will be celebrating a family dream - earning a high school diploma. Four years ago, East Side Heroes awarded scholarship aid to both of these young women at our annual banquet, because we believed what they said. Ana and Alma verbally vowed to keep a promise - they promised themselves and their families that they would give 100% each and every day until they reached all of their goals.

This April, East Side Heroes celebrated Ana and Alma's fulfillment of that promise. Both Ana and Alma have maintained above a 4.0 GPA and have applied to various colleges, such as Santa Clara University and Stanford University. Ana's career goal is to become a medical doctor in order to provide pro-bono services to low-income families throughout impoverished countries. Alma aspires to become a legal attorney in order to help achieve equality and empowerment for all women.

Each year, East Side Heroes' volunteers labor to raise scholarship funds for other 8th grade students who still dare to dream big dreams. East Side Heroes currently has six other students studying at Notre Dame High School, Archbishop Mitty High School, and Bellarmine College Prep. Please join us in our vow to support East Side Heroes' students as they continue relentlessly on their individual quests.



(with Yolanda King, granddaughter of Martin Luther King, Jr.)

### Meeting Community Needs

1. East Side Heroes addresses the achievement gap in our public education system by providing educational scholarships to low-income students who are already motivated to attend college-prep/private high schools in order to help them earn a college degree within four years, and quickly return back to their community to establish a life-long career of service. East Side Heroes also inspires hundreds of public school students by teaching them how to implement East Side Heroes' community improvement projects and by providing these students with effective mentorship.
2. We address Community Development/Neighborhood Preservation by teaching and motivating students to look at the needs of their own families, schools, and communities and develop a wide variety of creative and innovative service projects to empower local residents to be the solution and utilize available resources, in order to ultimately improve the quality of life for all. Our effort is designed to create a large-scale movement of compassion, which is empathy in action.

Rev. Steve Pinkston (Community Service Director for Bellarmine College Prep) had this to say about East Side Heroes:

I support ESH because I believe in the power of transformation. My first impression of Enrique Flores—back in 1994—was that he was a hard-nosed street kid with an armadillo shell who held others at a distance. Two years later, I had Enrique as a student. I found that his tough demeanor - in some respects - was a survival tool he used to negotiate his way between different communities. Having familiarity with gang life and its accompanying violence coupled with the move into an academic setting where 99+% of the students were college bound, Enrique had some conflicting nudges. I saw this young man "come to himself." He came to realize the value and power of an education. He came to appreciate the mentors and support structures that helped him move forward. He came to embrace the idea of "paying it forward."

I support ESH because I believe in the heart and vision of Enrique Flores. He has seen adolescents who come from challenging backgrounds who have a desire to learn. Enrique has encountered young people who are short when it comes to resources but long when it comes to drive and conviction. Enrique wants to improve the quality of life of at-risk youth by offering them mentorship, educational scholarships and leadership development skills. He strives to guide and inspire the compassionate leaders of tomorrow who will serve and impact their neighborhoods.

I support ESH because of the love and commitment of Enrique Flores. In Luke 12:48, Jesus shares "...to whom much is given, much is required..." Enrique has embraced these words and knows he has been blessed to be a blessing to others. He cannot rest nor sit on his hands when he sees young people in need. He is committed to inspiring, challenging, cajoling, supporting and

impacting the lives of others for good by any means necessary. In Enrique's words, "Leaders Create Leaders." These are the reasons that I support Enrique. These are the reasons I support his vision, East Side Heroes.

## Future Expansion Hopes of East Side Heroes

East Side Heroes is preparing to apply for "building capacity" grants and plans to use such funds as follows:

- \$50K+ = deposit in a savings account to generate interest for scholarships, and begin an endowment account with matching donors.
- \$20K = stipend for a part-time grant writer to help locate and apply for larger after school program grants and mentoring grants to sustain ESH long-term.
- \$20K = retreats and camping equipment for one hundred at-risk youth and young adults, in order to inspire them organize and implement community service projects and provide them a stipend to attend mentoring trainings and serve as peer-mentors to other students in their neighborhoods and schools.
- \$10K = transportation costs and stipend for Executive Director to organize and facilitate retreats, service projects, and on-going mentor trainings.



East Side Heroes hopes to implement its unique and effective mentoring style into all non-profit and educational settings that serve at-risk youth. Currently, the YWCA of Silicon Valley has adopted the East Side Heroes' mentoring style which serves over 400 high school students daily within its "Project Inspire" after-school program.

Another goal of East Side Heroes is to begin facilitating three-day rehabilitation retreats to serve primarily high school students and other young adults who find themselves struggling with addiction, gang violence, depression, eating disorders/weight issues, and who are seeking life-long caring mentors, enduring zeal, emotional healing from core issues, and clarity to one's life purpose. The outcomes from these retreats will be students working together to develop self-sustaining local community improvement projects and programs. East Side Heroes also plans to operate multiple after-school programs in the San Francisco Bay Area.



What are the greatest leadership challenges and strengths of East Side Heroes?

The greatest challenge facing East Side Heroes is the lack of a full-time Executive Director to implement and expand all programs areas to their full potential. However, the greatest leadership strength of East Side Heroes is the optimistic determination and passionate purpose driving its team - the Board Members, Executive Director, Volunteers, and Allies - to see the ultimate vision of East Side Heroes fulfilled. This strength is the reason why East Side Heroes refuses to allow difficult economic times to stop us from achieving our mission.

Web links:

Join East Side Heroes' Fan Club on Facebook:

<http://tinyurl.com/ESHonFacebook>

View more Media Interviews, Photos, and How to Donate at:

<http://www.eastsideheroes.org>

In Kinship,

Enrique S. Flores

enrique\_essj@hotmail.com

408-600-8412