

# Hispanic American Veterans Memorial *Ground-breaking Ceremony*

## November 11, 2011- 4:00 p.m.

*Buffalo & Erie County  
Naval & Military Park*

**Buffalo's Waterfront**



# The Idea of an Hispanic American Veterans Memorial

Over the years as Ventura Colon travelled throughout Buffalo, NY and Erie County, he became concerned about the fact that there were many war monuments, but none that were dedicated to Hispanic veterans. As a Vietnam War veteran Colon knew many who served during World War II, including Marcos Lopez who is known throughout Western New York in the American Legion community for his commitment and dedication to veterans. Lopez became one of the instrumental veterans to organize the only Hispanic Veterans American Legion post, the Gabriel A. Rodriguez American Legion Post 1928. The Gabriel A. Rodriguez Post, although not currently active, was named in memory of a Hispanic Vietnam vet from Western New York. He also knew other Hispanic Vietnam vets like Pete Herrera and Richard Cruz. Cruz also served in Iraq. These thoughts and observations led Colon to ask, "Why not a monument for us? What can be done about this?"

Colon's childhood friend and fellow Vietnam vet, Louie Feliciano, passed away in 2004 after a battle with illnesses related to Agent Orange, a deadly chemical used during the war. The idea of a monument for Hispanic veterans was back at the forefront once again. Colon spent the next several years viewing and discussing ideas with his close friend Benny Rodriguez, brother of Gabriel Rodriguez. Benny had served in the Navy during the Vietnam era. In the spring of 2008 Colon met with newly elected Niagara Councilman David A. Rivera to discuss the idea of a monument dedicated to the Hispanic Veterans of WNY. Councilman Rivera was in full agreement with the need for recognition of the fact that Hispanics have served this nation with honor in all wars and conflicts and agreed that the entire country has not fully recognized this fact, and that WNY was no different.

The idea of the monument took flight when the initial seed monies were identified to design and build a monument that would be dedicated to WNY's Hispanic Veterans. A site was discussed in the cities Niagara District, across from the Connecticut Street Armory, where the majority of Buffalo's Hispanics lived. An alternative site was suggested by Casimiro Rodriguez, the Naval and Military Park at Buffalo's Waterfront.

The project began to develop interest. Other veterans such as Benny Rodriguez, Carlos Benitez, Rosemary Caicedo, Jose Rivera, Tino Mejias, Angelo Lamberty and Jose Pizarro were approached and they too supported the concept. These individuals became the core group to make this idea a reality. Suggestions were made to contact Sergio Rodriguez of the Erie County Office of Veteran Affairs to discuss the concept and a core group was then formalized. Buffalo architect Francisco Guzman agreed to do the initial concept drawings pro bono. With the drawing in hand a meeting was convened with the core group, Buffalo Arts Commission and Councilman Rivera and the process began to take shape.

The core group saw that the project would take a lot of time, energy and resources, so they identified a fulltime architect, Brad Wales of the UB School of Architecture. After lengthy discussions, Wales accepted the challenge to create what we will see hear and to appreciate the Hispanic American Veterans Memorial of Western New York as being a part of Buffalo's rich history and a fitting tribute to all the Hispanic Veterans in WNY who fought and/or died for our country.

# Honoring Our Hispanic American Veterans

## The Vision

This memorial site is the inspiration of a few dedicated Western New York Veterans known as the “WNY Hispanic American Veterans Memorial Committee” (WNYHAMC). It honors all Hispanic American Veterans past, present and future.

The site will recognize the five branches of the Armed Forces: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard. It allows anyone wishing to participate an opportunity to perpetuate the memory of their loved ones who have given their life in order to bring about democracy and maintain peace within our world.

## The Purpose

The purpose of this memorial is to provide cultural diversity and educational awareness of all the Hispanic American military contributions throughout our American history.

# The Memorial Sculpture



**Architect: Brad Wales**

**Stone Memorial Designer: Tom Koch**

Whenever a serviceman or woman dies in the line of duty, it is customary to arrange their Boots, Rifle and Helmet as depicted in the picture of the monument. This arrangement is called the Battlefield Cross, Battle Cross or the Fallen Soldier Cross. The Battlefield Cross symbolizes a fallen warrior or hero. The rifle pointing downwards into the ground is in memorial of a soldier killed in action. The rifle is capped with a helmet and perhaps dog tags, and at the bottom, a pair of combat boots to represent the last march of the battle. These three items are essential gear for all service members. Now the service member has no further need for them.

A life sized lone infantryman is reverently kneeling in front of the Fallen Soldier Cross paying his last tribute to a comrade. The two bronze sculptures sit atop of a black granite ellipse which symbolizes eternity. The outer edge of the ellipse has 22 engraved flags; the United States of America's flag and 21 Latin- American flags from the Western Hemisphere where most Hispanic- American Veterans trace their Spanish Speaking ethnicity and raices (roots).

Underneath the ellipse is a black octagon shaped granite with an engraved phrase that reads "In gratitude to all Hispanic-American Veterans for their service." On the opposite side are the five engraved emblems of all the Armed Forces: Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Coast Guard. A small granite stone marker with a bronze plaque dated 11-11-11 "Groundbreaking Ceremony" will precede the larger monument. Five benches will surround the site allowing a place for respite and reflection. The ground will be adorned with 460 personalized engraved brick pavers. This will allow public and private participation in the process of "leaving a legacy".

# Order of Ceremonies

Commence 1600 hrs. / 4:00 pm  
Crystal J. Rodriguez: Mistress of Ceremonies

## Introduction / Welcome

Jose G. Rivera: Committee Chair  
COL Patrick J. Cunningham (R)

## Invocation

Mnsgr. David Gallivan  
Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church

## Posting of Colors

Western Region Cadets

## Pledge Of Allegiance

2011 Miss Borinquen: Shadaylee Vazquez

## National Anthem

Performed by Susan Santiago

## Brief Comments from Monument Supporters:

Jose G. Rivera: Committee Chair  
Mayor Byron Brown

Erie County Executive Chris Collins

Councilman David Franczyk

Councilman David A. Rivera

Councilman Darius Pridgen

COL Patrick J. Cunningham (R)

65th Infantry Regiment Representative

Gabriel A. Rodriguez American Legion Post # 1928

Past Commander: MAJ Carlos Benitez

Rodriguez Family: A family member

# Ground Breaking / Shovel Delegates

Mayor Byron Brown

Erie County Executive Chris Collins

Jose G. Rivera: Committee Chair

65th Infantry Representative

Rodriguez Family Representative

Councilman David A. Rivera

Councilman Darius Pridgen

COL Patrick J. Cunningham (R)

MAJ Carlos Benitez

NY Senator Mark Grisanti

HUB President Carmen Melendez

## Closing Remarks

Jose G. Rivera: Committee Chair

## Benediction

Pastor: Rev. Jose A. Claudio  
Iglesia Unida de Cristo El Nuevo Camino

## Reception

Buffalo Naval & Military Park (indoor)  
Music by Nelson Rivera and Jazz Conception

# Hispanic American Veterans Memorial Committee

Col. Patrick J. Cunningham (R)  
Rosemary Caicedo  
Lourdes T. Iglesias  
Sergio R. Rodriguez  
Jose G. Rivera  
Benigno V. Rodriguez  
Ventura Colon  
Carlos M. Benitez  
Juventino Mejia  
Jose C. Pizarro  
Casimiro D. Rodriguez  
Miguel Santos  
Crystal J. Rodriguez

\*\*\*\*\*

## Booklet Committee

José C. Pizarro  
Evelyn Pizarro  
Dinorah Santos

## Reception Committee

Lourdes Iglesias  
Juventino Mejia  
Rosemary Caicedo

# The 65th Infantry Regiment

## “Honor and Fidelity”

The history of Hispanic-Americans in the U.S. Armed forces is replete with stories of courage, heroism and valor. In Puerto Rico, their most famous unit is the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. The 65<sup>th</sup> was organized in 1899, one year after U.S. forces, mostly Guard members, seized Puerto Rico from Spain. The 65<sup>th</sup> was intended to be a defense force to protect Puerto Rico. The 65<sup>th</sup>, comprised primarily of Puerto Ricans, began as a volunteer regiment and participated in WWI and WWII. During the Korean War they saw extensive combat.

In World War II, the 65<sup>th</sup> remained in Puerto Rico until January 1943, when they moved to Panama and then to France in September 1944. The Army was not confident in the fighting ability of the 65<sup>th</sup> due to prejudice based on preconceived notions. In reality, the 65<sup>th</sup> was well-trained and proud. An exercise involving the 65<sup>th</sup> in February 1950 changed the minds of many Army leaders. They held off the entire 3rd Infantry Division in a successful defense and Pentagon planners took note.

With the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, the 65<sup>th</sup> was ordered to Korea and assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division. While the 65<sup>th</sup> was on its way, its sister Puerto Rico Guard unit, the 296<sup>th</sup> Infantry, was mobilized. Like many Guard units, the 296<sup>th</sup> was tasked to provide replacements. Fortunately, most Puerto Rico Guard members were assigned to the 65<sup>th</sup>. Shortly after the 65<sup>th</sup> arrived in South Korea, its commander, Col. William Harris, was approached by Eighth Army commander Lt. Gen. Walton Walker. The general asked, "Will the Puerto Ricans fight?" "I and my Puerto Ricans will fight anybody," replied Harris proudly. For the next three years the 65<sup>th</sup> fought their way up and down the Korean peninsula. Any doubts about their ability were dispelled.

The regiment earned a distinguished combat record. Fighting in some of the toughest battles of the Korean War, the 65<sup>th</sup> earned two U.S. Presidential Unit Citations, two Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citations, two U.S. Meritorious Unit Commendations and the Greek Gold Medal of Bravery. Four of its soldiers were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest award for valor.

In 1992, the 65<sup>th</sup> was honored in a National Guard heritage painting depicting the regiment conducting a bayonet charge against a Chinese division in February 1951.

Despite its gallantry in Korea, the 65<sup>th</sup> was inactivated in 1956. The Army no longer needed an infantry garrison in Puerto Rico, nor wanted any unit composed of a single ethnic group. It seemed like the 65<sup>th</sup> was gone forever. Until Brig. Gen. Juan Codero, Puerto Rico's Adjutant General, persuaded the Department of the Army to transfer the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry from the Regular Army to the Puerto Rico Army National Guard. The only infantry unit ever transferred from the active component Army to the Army Guard. On Feb. 15, 1959, the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry uncased its colors and took its place as a regiment of the Puerto Rico Army National Guard.

Since then, the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry, part of the 92nd Infantry Brigade, has trained extensively in the Caribbean, Central and South America. The 65<sup>th</sup> has also played a key role in state missions. Throughout its nearly 100 years of service, the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry has always lived up to its motto of "Honor and Fidelity."



## **Gabriel A. Rodriguez**

### **American Legion Post # 1928**

The Gabriel A. Rodriguez American Legion Post #1928 was chartered in Buffalo, New York, on January 11, 1986 by a group of local Hispanic-American veterans whose intention was to create a vehicle for sharing their military experiences in a background of common language and culture. The original meetings were excuses to get away and celebrate during sporting events. The post was the culmination of an idea in the mind of Marcos López, a World War II veteran and member in organizations like the American Legion and the Veteran of Foreign Wars. Most of the original members of the Rodriguez Post were from the Vietnam Era. The original and founding members of the post were: Pedro Salas, José G. Rivera, José C. Pizarro, Miguel A. Román, Jr., Benigno V. Rodríguez, Pedro López, Luz D. Rodríguez, Juan Hernández, Angelo Rivera, Emmanuel Lastra, Ibrahim Hernández, Ulpiano García López, Juan B. Negrón, Pablo M. Martínez, John Ponce and Bienvenido Rodríguez.

The Post was named after a local Hispanic-American service member who died of trauma associated with military service. Gabriel Angel Rodríguez (1948-1981), after whom the post was named, died as a result of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – a condition that has historically afflicted war veterans traumatized by combat

-related experiences. The diagnosis was virtually unrecognized as a medical condition until recent times. Much has been researched and learned about PTSD in the last twenty years. Recent findings show that today there are several types of therapy and medication to effectively treat this condition. Unfortunately, those therapies and medications were not effectively available when *Gabe* was being tormented by his traumatic experiences.

Shortly after its establishment in 1986, the post began to take a more serious social role within its community. At the end of that school year it began to award scholarships to students graduating from eighth and twelfth grade, with the intention of providing positive reinforcement for their academic efforts as well as motivating them to pursue higher education. On May 31, 1987, the post was granted a charter from the Boys Scouts of America and began a Cub Scout and a Boys Scout program to provide citizenship training, develop the character of neighborhood boys from poor and traditionally underrepresented minorities and conduct mental and physical fitness activities to keep their minds and bodies healthy. In addition, the organization took a leadership role in raising money to aid disaster areas in the USA as well as foreign countries such as Mexico. The post began to sponsor a chapter of Narcotics Anonymous to provide former drug users who were local veterans with counseling and support services. There were also various television appearances on local talk shows to discuss issues of concern to local veterans and joint participation with other posts to honor the memory of past service members during traditional veteran holiday celebrations.

Also immediately after receiving its charter the membership engaged in a complete and purposeful ethnically-integrated transformation and began to voice their views with regards to social justice. The post began to aggressively seek and incorporate in its ranks members from all ethnic and gender groups, regardless of their age and sexual orientation. It also assumed a vocal and determined role in defense of the rights of American citizens to speak, read, write and receive services in languages other than English. Unfortunately, as the post entered the 2000 millennium the membership began to thin down and the post lost its charter. However, the memory of the Gabriel A. Rodriguez American Legion Post # 1928 will live forever in the memory of those who participated or benefitted from its mission and vision within the Buffalo community.



## GABRIEL A. RODRIGUEZ

Gabriel Angel Rodriguez was born on March 8, 1948, in Patillas, Puerto Rico. He was the fifth of thirteen children born to Petra and Primitivo Rodriguez. In 1953, the Rodríguez family moved to the Buffalo region, like many other immigrant families, in search of a better life. Since his father worked at the Bethlehem Steel Plant, the family established themselves in the City of Lackawanna and later moved to the Lower West Side of Buffalo. *Gabe*, as he was known to his family and friends, attended Grover Cleveland High School. In 1968, his sense of family responsibility moved him to drop out and seek employment with the Ford Motor Company.

Soon after beginning to work at Ford, he was called to duty by his country and joined the U.S. Army. He served a tour of duty in the Republic of Vietnam from September 1968 to October 1969, where he was stationed with the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in the Qui Nhon region.

Upon returning from Vietnam, unbeknownst to him, Rodriguez was afflicted with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This condition, unfortunately, was not officially diagnosed until much later. After the Vietnam service he returned to Ford, and even served a term of enlistment with Company B, 152<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion, NYS National Guard from 1971 to 1977, but continued to be troubled by all the memories of the war. Finally, on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1981, Gabe succumbed to the torment caused by PTSD and took for himself the peace he so longed for, leaving behind a family and scores of friends who continue to love him long after his demise.



*In  
Gratitude To  
All  
Hispanic  
American  
Veterans  
For  
Their Service.*



*Puerto Rican Day Parade of WNY Association, Inc.*



*The Puerto Rican Day Parade of WNY wishes to extend our deepest gratitude and appreciation to all Hispanic/American soldiers who have served our country and the world, unselfishly, and with great honor, in times of peace, and in times of greatest need. May God Bless you and your families for your service.*

*Congratulations to the Hispanic/American Memorial Committee for your leadership in bringing this long overdue honor to the forefront. Thank you.*

*Charles Torres, President*

*Carmen Doeseckle, Vice-President,  
Maritza Vega, Treasurer*

*Irma Lorenzo, Vice President  
Gloria Hernandez, Secretary*

*Maria Diaz, Sgt-At-Arms*

*Yolanda Martinez-Rodriguez, Public Relations*

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*Taisha St. Jean Garcia, Princess*

*Juliana Rosario, Miss Coqui*

*Grand Marshal 2011 Jose "Chegui" Rivera*

*"There are no words that can truly express the gratitude I have to those who serve our Country. But thank you and thanks to your families as well for all they sacrificed. May God bless you, your families and The United States of America."*

*"No existen palabras que puedan expresar la gratitud que siento hace todos los que han servido a nuestro país. Gracias a ustedes y a sus familias por todo lo que han sacrificado. Que Dios los bendigas a ustedes, su familias y Los Estados Unidos de América."*



**Hon. Betty Calvo-Torres**

Presiding Domestic Violence Court Judge

Buffalo City Court

50 Delaware Avenue

Buffalo, New York 14202

716-845-2643



**ECMC** is proud to serve our vital Western New York Hispanic community and honored to pay tribute to those Hispanic-American men and women who served in the U.S. Armed Forces throughout our history. We salute the millions of Hispanic Americans who have fought with distinction and valor in every war since the founding of our country.



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**Congratulations  
to all Hispanic American Veterans**

# PANORAMA HISPANO NEWS

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Publisher: Edwin Martinez

For information: [phnews@msn.com](mailto:phnews@msn.com)



We, at Hispanics United of Buffalo, Inc. would like to express our support to the Groundbreaking event for the Veterans Memorial Monument on this November 11, 2011.

Shall this monument remind us of all those Hispanic-American veterans who served for our freedom in all wars throughout time.

Hispanics United of Buffalo, Inc.  
254 Virginia Street, Buffalo, NY 14201  
(716) 856-7110

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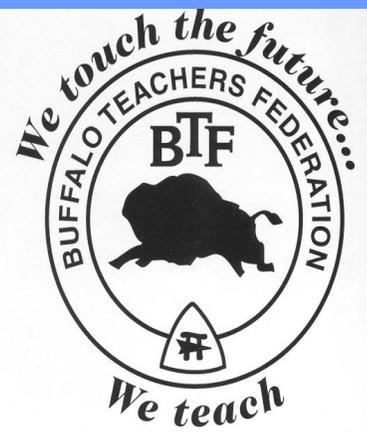
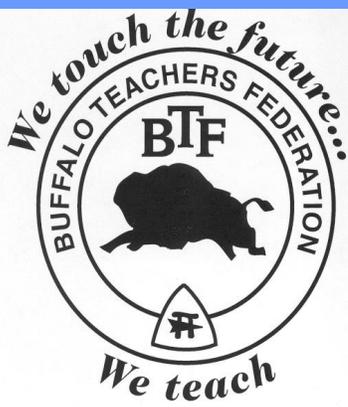
We salute our Hispanic American veterans.



While LPCiminelli is proud to build our communities, we are humbled by the Hispanic American veterans who built democracy and protected liberty. That's why we are honored to be part of this historical event. We thank you for your service. [lpciminelli.com](http://lpciminelli.com)

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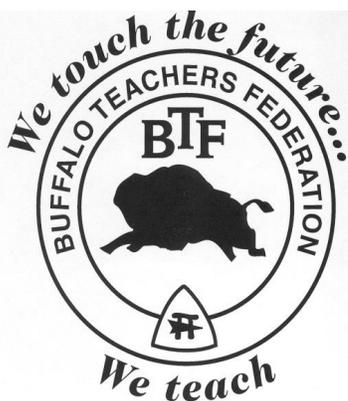
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**WE HONOR**

**YOU ALL”**

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**CASA DE ARTE** proudly salutes the Hispanic-American Veterans men and woman who have honorably served our country.



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*Honoring Our Hispanic-American Veterans*

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**Francisco Vazquez and  
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Hispanic-American Veterans who Have  
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Labor Council for Latin American Advancement



Honoring Our Hispanic  
American Veterans

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salutes our

Hispanic American Veterans

Thank you for your past, present and future service in the

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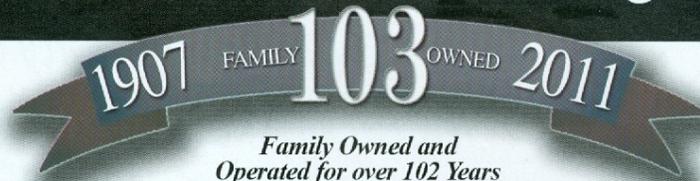
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