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**CORNERSTONES**  
 THE NATIONAL FARM WORKER SERVICE CENTER HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

## Interview with NFWSC President Chavez

Since its inception in 1966, the National Farm Workers Service Center, Inc. (NFWSC) has served the needs of farm workers and working people throughout the Southwest. And with the passing of Cesar E. Chavez in 1993, the co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO and founder of the NFWSC, his legacy and the immense responsibility that comes with it have fallen to his family to carry on. For purposes of this newsletter, the following is an abridged interview conducted on May 29, 2002 with Paul F. Chavez, President and CEO of the NFWSC and son of the late Cesar E. Chavez.

the tremendous needs that farm workers had in and outside of the workplace. So the idea was that there would be a labor organization to assist the needs that

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*Cornerstones: Why and how did the National Farm Workers Service Center, Inc. (NFWSC) come about?*

Paul F. Chavez: If you take a look at the early years of the farm worker movement, you'll see that my father and Dolores (Huerta) had researched on the best way to organize farm workers and address their needs. They had studied a lot of the organizations at the time that had tried to organize unions for farm workers, and they knew that their approach was going to have to be different not only because of tactical concerns but also just because of the profoundness of the poverty and



Farm worker housing conditions like these above are examples of why Dolores Huerta, Walter Ruether, and Cesar Chavez founded the NFWSC.

### Letter from the Vice President

On June 28, 2002, the NFWSC closed on the acquisition of Aguila Oaks (formerly Worthing Oaks), 346 units in San Antonio, Texas. While you will learn more about this property in the next issue of Cornerstones, I am able and would rather write about the subtle, yet strategic, importance of Aguila Oaks.

As you may know, the NFWSC's Housing and Economic Development Fund is two thirds through a strategic planning process. In May, we met for the second of

three meetings to fine-tune our vision and core ideology and to begin a discussion of how they relate to our production goals. After examining extensive demographic data, it became absolutely clear to the Planning Committee that if the NFWSC is to increase its impact on Latino and low-income families, it must have a presence in California and Texas. Combined, California and Texas are home to 50% of the Latino population in the United States.

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## Chavez Interview (cont.)

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workers had at work, but there also needed to be an organization that would address the needs outside of work. This all goes back to the early social unionism that was commonplace in the labor movement at the turn of the century, and so it was kind of a throwback to the old thinking. An interesting thing was that that was a form of labor unionism that immigrants brought in. And if you look at it, it really did talk to setting up organizations that addressed the needs of not only American workers, but it also helped immigrant workers who were trying to get settled. That was the strategy.

*What was the original link between the UFW and the Service Center?*

They come from the same tradition of wanting to help farm workers. If you look at the founders of the Service Center, it was the same young leaders of the UFW. My father was the President and Chairman of the Board of the Service Center for many years as well as being the President and Founder of the UFW. Throughout the years, there have been Service Center Board members who have served full-time as the Executive Director of the Service

Center. But while there was a shared history, the Service Center has always had its own assignments, or its own areas of concern. A big one that we got our name from was the advent of the "service center," the concept that was developed by my father back in the early 1950's where poor people, immigrants, could go to a facility that would offer them any kind of service they needed, whether it was translating documents from Spanish to English, from English to Spanish, or helping people fill out forms or helping folks get legal representation. My father knew that there needed to be a place where people in a community could go to when they needed help, and he called them "service centers." They were there to help folks, and the idea was that if you helped folks with some of their basic needs, when it came time to organize a union or to get people out to vote or to attend meetings, even if they didn't really understand the bigger picture or the philosophical issues at hand, out of friendship and a sense of obligation of wanting to return a favor, people would join you. The idea was based on the premise that if you help somebody, you're going to make a friend and that friend is going to be there in a time of need and be one of your best supporters down the road. That was the basic concept for founding, the basic idea

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## Letter from the Vice President (cont.)

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When I inform colleagues and supporters about our vision of growth, a question that comes up frequently is how does an organization manage a much larger volume of work spread out more and more over the Southwest? The answer is by establishing local and/or regional offices.

Our acquisition of Aguila Oaks provides the Housing and Economic Development Fund a financially feasible opportunity to establish an office in San Antonio, Texas. Through the San Antonio office, the NFWSC will better access the local resources that allow for deeper affordability, underwrite the localized development practices that can break a project, manage the endless details of the daily work and nurture the partnerships needed to provide social services.

Through our planning process, we have recognized that it will be necessary to change and enhance the internal and external infra-

structures under which we currently operate in order to adequately tackle our growth goals. Acquiring 346 units for low-income families is an immensely satisfying feat. But when this acquisition is viewed within the context of our growth plans, Aguila Oaks becomes priceless.

Thank you for your support along the way, and I look forward to working with you along the journey.



## Albuquerque To Get an Additional 136 Units of Multi-Family Affordable Housing

With a \$4 million tax credit award from the state of New Mexico, the NFWSC will begin construction of an 80-unit, mixed income, multi-family housing project in the South Valley section of Albuquerque. Located in southern Albuquerque, the project sits just off a main north/south thoroughfare, Isleta Boulevard, where a sizable commercial zone offers residents goods and services. The vicinity surrounding the site has single-family homes and trailers.

This project will be 75% affordable and targets 30%, 40%, and 50% AMI while the rest will be market-rate. The unit mix is two-, three-, and four-bedroom units accommodating larger families in need of affordable housing. Amenities include laundry facilities as well as hookups in the apartments, a computer lab, a basketball court and a playground. Youth Development, Inc. (YDI), the same organization that operates the Headstart program at our Mountain View Apartments property will be our partner in providing various services on-site.

Englewood Development Corporation has been hired as the architect. With a total development cost of \$7.4 million, this project is scheduled to be completed and in service by December 31, 2003. We hope to break ground within the next six months.

Also in Albuquerque is a 56-unit project that was awarded \$3 million in tax credits from New Mexico. Located in a mixed-housing density area close to our Mountain View Apartments property, this project will have 20 two-bedroom units, 20 three-bedroom units, and 16 four-bedroom units. This property is central to schools, a library, the interstate, and the university.

Englewood Development Corporation will be the architect, and YDI also has partnered with us to provide services to the future residents. This project has a total development cost of \$5.3 million.

## Chavez Interview (cont.)

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behind the first services offered by, the Service Center. Throughout the years though, it was decided that those services should be handled more directly by the UFW, in order to coordinate more closely with some of their activities. And so, it was at that point when the Service Center really began to take a look at its own future and began to focus on providing services that would complement the work that the UFW was doing, and more importantly, that would address the unmet needs of the larger community.

*When and how did you become involved in the Service Center?*  
Up until the late Eighties, I had served as a Service Center Board member. It was in 1988-89 that I was asked by the President of the Service Center, who at the time was my father, if I'd be willing to start working with the Service Center on a full-time basis. At that point, I was a manager for the UFW, and I'd been involved throughout the years. I was a political director at one time, and I was a labor negotiator and ran the direct mail marketing operation for the UFW. They asked if I'd be will-

ing to go to the Service Center and help develop the vision and the programs for the future. And so in the late '80s, I got my first taste as we moved to Fresno, and we learned about property management and real estate development. A couple of years later, I became President of the Service Center, and we began to focus on developing affordable housing. We also had a broadcast license for our Phoenix station that went on the air in 1991. But the radio operations were really being managed by the farm workers communications, which was a separate nonprofit. It was shortly after my father passed away that the Service Center became concerned with being able to have a sense of direction for all of the different nonprofits. We sat down with the leadership of the farm workers communications, and the decision was made that we would run our own radio station. In addition to that, we would merge KUFW with other educational radio stations and basically mount our own communications fund. That was in the mid-'90s, and since that time, both operations have really grown tremendously.

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## Chavez Interview (cont.)

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*Growing up as the son of Cesar Chavez and the immense legacy that goes with the farm worker movement, how do you deal with that in your life?*

It's an issue that we've always had to deal with growing up, but we knew that while my father was a father, he was also making history and at the same time doing something in places far away from our home. It's something that we've always recognized, that there are some big shoes to fill, but I think that in all of our dealings with my father, it was important to him that we all chose the areas of work that we wanted to get into and that we did not feel obligated to continue to do the work because it was expected of us. That's not to say that he wasn't proud of that fact that all of us have worked for the union at one time or another, and a number of us still continue to do so on a full-time basis. Like any father, he wanted us to follow in his footsteps, but we've come to terms with the idea that his shoes will probably never be filled and that in terms of our success, we will be measured with a different yard stick. When it comes to our own legacy, it really boils down to being able to say that I did everything I could during my productive years to make things better. The contributions we make may be dwarfed in comparison to the ones that my father made, but they're still something we can be proud of.



Paul F. Chavez has some big audacious goals for the work of the NFWSC.

*What is the Service Center currently doing in urban areas?*

In the mid- to late-'90s, we began thinking about where the Service Center was at and how the environment had changed around it. We looked at some of the tremendous demographic changes, but we also took a look at some of the competencies we had developed. We had been receiving calls for many years from folks who had known us through our work with the farm workers and who had asked us, "Hey, listen, you think that you could help us with our own housing needs?" People who had worked in agriculture at one time and had left the field approached the UFW and asked for representation. In their mind, even though they were in different industries and geographic areas, they knew of us because of the experience and integrity that we brought to our work and asked us for guidance with some of these issues. As we began to take a look at the changing landscape, it became obvious to us that while we will always pride ourselves in the work we've done in the agricultural parts of the United States, immigrants who live in cities basically have the same needs as those of farm workers who live in rural areas. It's just a natural progression for our work.

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Residents of the first farm worker retirement community, Agbayani Village. Most of the Filipino immigrants did not have surviving families to nurture them in their old age.



Filipino farm workers retiree Candido Taclioben embraces Chavez at the dedication of the UFW's Agbayani retirement village, June 1974. Photo courtesy of El Malcriado.

## Chavez Interview (cont.)

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*What is the future of the Service Center, and what impact do you see the Service Center having 20 years from now?*

We've come to the realization that we'll never have all the resources necessary to address and eliminate the lack of affordable housing for our community, but with that realization comes a good idea of where we can come be of service. First of all, there is a great number of families to whom we can offer affordable housing, but it's more than just affordable housing -- we can offer people a good, healthy environment for their kids grow up in. Part of our housing strategy is to give people good, decent facilities. We also want to build healthy communities. We're talking about places where kids don't have to worry about their next-door neighbor being a drug dealer or not; so that through the work of the Service Center, their horizons will be broadened and one day they may actually realize some of their dreams. And then the other area involves establishing these standards for housing and services. While we may not be able to address all the housing issues, we should help communities set new standards so that when developers come in to do projects we make

sure they also give back to the communities and offer the most basic services that people need. Doing both things, providing housing and social services directly and setting new standards that will make other developers live up to the application, will go a long way to ensure that the Service Center will be a recognized leader in national housing and not just the leader for the housing of Latino people throughout the United States.

*Any last comments?*

Part of the challenge is to find the folks who share the vision that we have and who are prepared and able to make a contribution to our work. That for me has probably been the most enjoyable part of the work, working with folks who share our vision and who go about it on a daily basis in a manner that inspires everyone around them.

## Staff Changes

There are some more changes happening at the Los Angeles office of the NFWSC. Our communications person, Alex Smith, is leaving us to go to law school in New York City. With the NFWSC for nearly three years, he has established Cornerstones as the voice of the Housing and Economic Development Fund. Replacing him is Ricardo Acuña, an Arizona native and immensely competent successor.

Mr. Acuña joined the NFWSC in April 2002 and is responsible for identifying and securing the resources necessary to develop affordable housing and community development activities. He coordinates special events and produces organizational materials. In addition, Mr. Acuña provides research support for the Housing and Economic Development team, including, but not limited to, research on community development resources, community needs, political supporters, union activity, support services for future tenants and homeowners, and preliminary review of potential projects. Prior to joining the NFWSC, Mr. Acuña worked

as Copy Editor for the Los Angeles Towers Perrin office, a consulting management company. His duties included proofreading and editing print communication materials. Mr. Acuña has a B.A. in English and French Literatures from Stanford University and an M.F.A. in Screenwriting from Columbia University.





**NATIONAL FARM WORKERS SERVICE CENTER**  
**HOUSING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

634 SOUTH SPRING ST. STE. 719 LOS ANGELES, CA . 90014  
PHONE (213) 362-0260 FAX (213) 362-0265 NFWSCHED@UFWMAIL.COM

National Farm Workers Service Center, Inc.

Paul Chavez, President  
Emilio Huerta, Secretary  
Eva Vasquez-Camacho, Treasurer  
Anthony Chavez  
Mike Ybarra  
Roberto De La Rosa  
Juanita Valdez Cox  
Tanis Ybarra  
Leticia Maldonado - Stamos  
David Villarino  
Luis Conde

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Robert Joy, Housing Director  
Heriberto Barrios, Project Manager  
Ernesto Espinoza, Project Manager  
Cesar Marengo, Project Manager  
Jackie Monterrosas, Assistant Project Manager  
Ricardo Acuna, Communications Manager  
Suairis Hernandez, Office Administrator  
Lydia Avila, Summer Intern

Property Management Staff

Sabrina Padama, Vice President  
Vicky Dartas, Manager, Casas Blancas Apartments  
Ana Dominguez, Manager, Manzanilla Apartments  
Sylvia Duran, Manager, La Paz Villa Apartments  
Candy Flores, Property Supervisor  
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Nancy Romero, Administrative Assistant  
Rosa Ruelas, Payroll Clerk

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