

HOMEFRONT

A BORN LEADER

Not one
to sit still,
Tom Lopez
reaches out
to community

By LESLEY LAYTON TARPINIAN
Leader Staff

All his life, Tom Lopez has been a leader.

Born to Ines and Isaac Lopez in McNeil in 1927, he is the eldest of 10 children. He was the first Hispanic male to graduate from Round Rock High School; he has been a city councilman; and he has participated in civic organizations, city boards, church and coached Little League.

And, he always has taken that role as a leader seriously.

"I was one of those that like to get involved," he said. "I had a job, but still I wanted to do more for the community."

That dedication earned him a 1997 Local Legend Award, presented by the Round Rock Historic Preservation Commission at the Jan. 23 city council meeting. Also receiving plaques and recognition that day were Harriet Rutland, who has helped preserve the city's history, and Pete Correa, who also has served on the city council.

Local Legend Awards have been presented annually for six years. According to Historic Preservation Commission Chairman Bob Brinkman, they honor and thank people who have lived here for a long time, have been involved in community service and unsung heroes — "citizens with positive and lasting impact" and who "exemplify the very essence of Round Rock."

"Just community service — a long-time familiar face" is how Lopez exemplified those qualifications, Brinkman said.

"To me, I feel very proud to receive this honor and being recognized as one of the local, local people who have been real active in serving the community," Lopez said. "It's something to be proud of."



Tom Lopez is the first-born of 10 children. He also has been a leader as the first Hispanic male to graduate from Round Rock High School, in the military and throughout the Round Rock community.

Previous recipients have included educators Xenia Voigt and Noel Grisham, David Carlin Sr. and the Old Settlers Association.

Lopez has encountered some leaders of his own, with his parents definitely being a big influence. But they weren't the only ones — his teachers and school administrators "would sit and talk to me and give me encouragement."

That encouragement helped him

to continue past the sixth grade at the one-room McNeil School and finish his schooling at the middle and high schools in Round Rock.

"It was difficult when I first came here," he said, adding that at the McNeil School, students weren't taught at the same pace and he had to catch up. For that reason, most other students who moved didn't grasp enough. This meant he was the second Hispanic student to graduate from Round Rock High School, with

the first one a female student who graduated two or three years ahead of him.

He earned his diploma with the support of his father.

"He made sure I was schooled. I stayed in school," Lopez said. "With his efforts, I kept on."

"I was glad to get the diploma," he added.

His brothers and sisters followed in those same footsteps.

After graduating, he married Linda Molina in 1949 at St. William's Catholic Church. Together, they raised three daughters — Gloria, Anita and Sophia — and one son — Carlos.

Shortly after their marriage, Lopez enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. When he retired, he had risen to the rank of master sergeant.

"It was great," he said. "You stay 20 years, you gotta like it."

Through the course of those 20 years, he was stationed in San Antonio, Alabama, Greece, Germany, Saudi Arabia and Taiwan. He also flew into Turkey, Iran, France, Spain, England, Italy, Vietnam, the Philippines, Japan and Korea. But

he never forgot where he came from: "I always considered this my home."

After leaving the military in 1968 and moving to San Antonio, Lopez thought he might like a federal job similar to ones which his sisters had. So he moved back to Round Rock in 1970 and became a tax examiner for the IRS accounting branch in Austin. He retired from his second career 19 years later.

In that period, he became very active in Round Rock, serving three terms on the city council, which he left in 1980.

He served the city during a period of large growth, which was straining Round Rock's water supply.

"We were going dry," he said.

He said the city worked with the Brazos River Authority to get water from the lake in Georgetown.

"So, it was a start, and that's how Round Rock was able to manage growth," Lopez said.

Other accomplishments while he was on the council include paving the streets in the The Flats, at no cost to homeowners, through the use of grant and city money, and drainage

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LOCAL LEGEND

LOCAL LEGEND AWARDS

The Round Rock Historic Preservation Commission created the Local Legend Award in 1990, announcing the first recipients in 1991. The program recognizes citizens who have had a positive and lasting impact on the culture, development and history of Round Rock, and who exemplify the very essence of the community.

Nominations are accepted year round. To nominate a Local Legend, send the person's name, address, phone number, if available, and a brief description of the person and his/her achievements to:

The Historic Preservation Commission
c/o The Department of Planning and Community Development
221 E. Main St.
Round Rock, Texas 78664.

The nominator's name is kept confidential.

Recipients can be individuals or groups who have played an important, if not always prominent, role in the city's history.

Previous recipients include the Rev. Oliver Berglund; Mack and Lorenzo Rubio; the Domino Players; Genoveva Rendon; Billie Sue Henna; and Rudolph Pettersen and O.F. Perry, whose awards were given posthumously.

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Legend: Described as willing to give to others

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improvement.

His civic involvement doesn't stop there. Lopez also has served on the Round Rock Recreation Board, the Community Services Council, El Amistad Club and American Legion Post No. 447. Plus, at St. William's he was an usher and participated in fundraisers.

Though Lopez has retired twice, that doesn't mean he has quit working. In fact, he has taken advantage of retirement to open new doors.

And the latest door he has opened is with the Round Rock ISD, for which he started working six years ago as a migrant recruiter. He matched families with a federally funded program to assist migrant chil-

dren with clothing, medical and dental care, and helping to keep students in school until they graduate.

His present position with the RRISD is as a lunchroom monitor at Bluebonnet Elementary.

"I want to keep active," he said.

One life-long Round Rock resident who has watched Lopez stay active is Mario Carlin, who himself stays active with the Historic Preservation Commission, the Lions Club, Knights of Columbus, Sertoma and El Amistad. Carlin is the grandson of previous Local Legend recipient David Carlin Sr.

"I've known Tom all my life," said Carlin, 24, adding he's been a good role model.

The qualities that Carlin uses to

describe Lopez include very honest, loyal and hardworking.

"He's always willing to give up his time — really willing to give to others," he said, adding Lopez speaks from experience.

"He has a lot of words of wisdom and encouragement," Carlin said.

Maybe Lopez is a victim of some of the progress and growth that he was able to bring to Round Rock. In November, he and his wife moved to Taylor because he wanted to get away from the traffic. But, his heart remains here.

"I miss the people that I know," he said, adding he still comes back to Round Rock to keep up with El Amistad and the American Legion.

"I haven't left it completely."