

Al Castellano transcended his humble beginnings as a farmworker and grocery clerk to live an incredible life where he shone as a community activist and volunteer, philanthropist and historian. For him, his most important role was that of a loving husband, father and grandfather to his family.

Al Castellano was born in Artesia, New Mexico in 1934. When he was eight years old, he and his family made their way to California, landing with family in Visalia where they picked cotton. They ultimately settled in Hollister where his family worked as farmworkers. His father, Cerildo Castellano, left the family when he was ten years old and Al was raised by his mother, Trinidad Castellano, along with two brothers and two sisters. As the oldest son, throughout high school he worked nights at a local grocery store to help the family. Due to having a flexible boss, he was able to provide for the family while also playing on the high school basketball team and playing trumpet in the band. Al served in the U.S. Army in the 1950s where his typing skills landed him in the position of Company Clerk. After he was discharged, he found a job with a crystal-making company in Hollister and later worked in Palo Alto and Santa Cruz in the aerospace industry.

Al met his wife, Carmen Ramirez at an out-of-town wedding, offering her a ride home to Watsonville, California, where she was born and raised. He soon decided she had all of the attributes he was looking for in a wife and mother and asked her to marry him. They were together for 57 years. Carmen passed in 2020.

After their marriage, they made their home in Capitola and eventually moved to San Jose in the mid-1960's. They had to overcome housing discrimination, yet eventually found a home to buy in San Jose's Cambrian Park neighborhood. Here they raised their three children: Maria West, Carmela Castellano-Garcia and Armando Castellano. Education was important to the Castellanos, and all three of their children graduated from college and pursued graduate degrees. The arts were also an important part of the family's life: Their two daughters each danced with Los Lupeños de San Jose and their son, Armando, became a professional french horn player who founded and leads the classical music group, Quinteto Latino. Al and Carmen were immensely proud of their children, who have achieved success in their careers and in their Foundation work. They also took great joy in attending sporting, music and educational events of their grandchildren. Al was delighted with the birth of his only great-grandchild in 2024 who he referred to as "Carmelita" as she carries the middle name Carmen, named after her grandmother.

Al had a 25-year career as a grocery clerk at Safeway starting in 1970s after experiencing layoffs in the aerospace industry. Carmen began her long career as executive secretary at San Jose City College. As a couple they invested in their community. Al often took leadership roles in their children's schools in Cambrian Park. He served as president of the Parker Elementary Home and School Club. He served the Band Boosters at Leigh High School. He was a leader and advocate for more diversity in the teaching staff. He was known to advocate with the local newspaper, the San Jose Mercury News, for Latino representation on the editorial board.

As an active member of the broader San Jose community, Al made significant contributions to the documentation of Silicon Valley's Chicano community in from 1980's-1990's, largely through his affiliation with the San Jose GI Forum. Al's long history with the American GI Forum began in 1982 when he joined the San Jose Chapter. His daughter, Carmela, became National Queen of the American GI Forum in 1983. For years he worked with the Miss San Jose GI Forum queen contestants. He often helped them improve their speeches by sharing videotapes of their speech rehearsals. From 1982 to 1999, Al videotaped various San Jose GI Forum events, including Cinco de Mayo and 16 de Septiembre festivities, parade award luncheons, and other Latino community activities. He worked with the San Jose GI Forum Scholarship Committee to organize and record their award dinners. His efforts contributed to the San Jose GI Forum raising over one million dollars for scholarship awards. Al curated several art shows during the Fiestas Patrias and Cinco de Mayo celebrations, which gave a unique opportunity for local Latino artists to have a platform to showcase their art. The art displays, ultimately held at the San Jose Convention Center, also featured Mexican Folk Dance and Mariachi music. Al played a leadership

role in enhancing the San Jose G.I. Forum celebrations by including community colleges and university recruiters and voter registration tables. He organized youth events at the fiestas including the development of the "Go to School, Stay in School" dances which featured local DJs. Through his videotaping and photography, he documented many local community events, including parades, music and dance performances, youth events, and public interest gatherings. Those videotapes, along with other digital videos, photographs and the Castellano Family Foundation papers, are now part of the Castellano Family Collection held by the San Jose State University Library and the San Jose Public Library at the MLK Jr. Main Library downtown. These photos and videos represent the only comprehensive archive of Chicano life in San Jose in the 80s and 90s.

Al has been a volunteer and community activist for decades. In this capacity he was a member of the Steering Committee which led to the development of the School of Arts and Culture. He was very attached to this organization and supported it in many ways. He served on the board of directors of Latinas Contra Cancer, the Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley and the San Jose GI Forum. In recent years he led efforts behind the scenes to reprise the Cinco de Mayo celebrations for the community in San Jose. These efforts led to him serving as Grand Marshall in the Cinco de Mayo parade in 2024, the first to occur after years of Al pushing the community to revive the effort.

Al made headlines on Sunday morning in June 2001 when he realized he held the only winning ticket to the California Lottery jackpot. He won the California State Lottery's Super Lotto Plus, taking home a prize of \$141 million, the largest single winner prize in the history of the California State Lottery. This monumental win enabled Al and Carmen to establish the Castellano Family Foundation in November of 2001. The Castellano Family Foundation supported nonprofit organizations serving Santa Clara County. The Foundation worked to promote Latino arts and culture, help Latino youth and youth of color achieve their educational goals, and invest in the leadership development of Latinos and their nonprofit partners. Over a period of 22 years, the Foundation became a prominent philanthropic force, awarding more than \$10 million to over 150 organizations. The Foundation also vaulted the Castellanos to the forefront of a nationwide conversation about the inequities in philanthropic funding for nonprofits, especially those run by and serving people of color. Al and Carmen were very community-oriented philanthropists and became a regular presence at many community events in Silicon Valley and interacted extensively with their grantee community. Their goal in philanthropy was to empower and uplift the Latino community of Silicon Valley and beyond.

While his wife, Carmen, was the driving force behind the creation of the Foundation, Al was by her side as an equal partner for the first ten years. After that, in 2011, Al asked his three children to join the foundation board with his wife as he stepped aside and let the next generation lead. Al's spirit of generosity and community empowerment continued to be a driving force behind the foundation until its sunset in 2023.

Al was honored twice with the American GI Forum Member of the Year award while he was part of the San Jose Chapter. During his lifetime of 90 years, Al felt deeply privileged to have worked on the San Jose GI Forum's fiesta projects, which he considered one of his greatest achievements. In addition to these accomplishments, Al and Carmen were recipients of numerous prestigious awards. They were honored with the Portraits of Success Award, the ABBY Award from the Arts Council Silicon Valley, the Tequio Award from the Mexican Consulate, and the Distinguished Philanthropist of the Year Award from the Latino Community Foundation. They also received the Si Se Puede Award from the Chavez Family Foundation, were named PACT 2009 Leadership in Action Honorees, were presented with the "La Familia" Award from the Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley and in 2015 with the Cornerstone of the Arts Award from City of San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs. Al was also recognized by the California Chicano News Media Association, and in 2006, Alcario was named Father of the Year by the American Diabetes Association. Just this past March, Al received the Alma Award from Latinas Contra Cancer. These accolades reflect the deep commitment to supporting the Latino community and cultural preservation efforts.

Al's lasting legacy is one of community, cultural preservation, philanthropy, and dedication to his family, which was an inspiration to those around him.