

Healthcare for low-income families threatened



Healthcare for all delivered with dignity and respect was the battle cry for a team of doctors and staff led by the first Harvard-educated Chicano doctors, Dr. Richard Rivera and Sylvestre Quevedo. Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers Inc. (PNHC), was established in 1975 to provide access to care for those left without due to poverty and discrimination.

Even before the first issue was published in May 1976, there was an unwritten understanding between the health center and *La Cucaracha*. Because both entities were serving essentially the same population, they agreed to support one another. PNHC provided much needed financial support for *La Cucaracha* in the form of paid advertising and the newspaper provided an equally important means of communication with the Pueblo community.

As PNHC grew from a single clinic to four clinics serving 40,000 patients, *La Cucaracha* readers were introduced to new medical staff, expanded services provided to Medicaid and low income patients on a sliding fee scale. Before 1975, there were large numbers of low-income families who fell between the gaps created by local doctors refusing to accept new Medicaid and/or uninsured patients.

Services included physical exams, vision and hearing screenings, pre and post-natal care, counseling, dental care, pharmacy, x-ray, and Women, Infant and Children (WIC) services.

The local medical establishment was threatened by the competition and opposed the centers in numerous ways including lobbying to cut the center's federal funding. The Pueblo Chieftain and Star Journal newspapers piled on with unsubstantiated reports of misspending and misuse of federal funds.

District Attorney Joseph Losavio raided two of the centers and confiscated individual medical records. The raids triggered an unsuccessful attempt to recall Losavio. A five-year long legal battle resulted in a settlement in favor of the plaintiffs. Although the accusations against the health center proved to be false, local politicians reached out to federal agencies to limit or garner control of the clinics and PNHC was abruptly defunded in 1982.

Despite the loss of funding, PNHC had become the largest primary care provider in Pueblo County and set the bar for medical care for the indigent. Dr. Rivera remained in Pueblo and built one of the city's largest private practices and continues to develop progressive health care models.

In addition to providing medical treatment for thousands, PNHC also served as a proving ground for many doctors and medical practitioners who went on to carry the torch ignited by Dr. Rivera, including the late Dr. Virgilio Licona, who started as a nurse, and a physician's assistant at PNHC and went on to develop La Clínica — one of Northern Colorado's largest medical practices. Dr. Licona and his wife Barbara were early supporters of *La Cucaracha*.



Family of 'Atomic Vet' writes letter of thanks

August 14, 1982
CARTAS ... Health Centers
 To the Editor:

People are saying that Pueblo does not need weren't for the Pueblo Neighborhood Health Centers. If it Centers and Dr. Richard Rivera, my father would not have gotten the excellent medical care that he had during his fight with cancer, a fight he lost July 18, 1982.

My father was on a fixed income and could not afford any other medical care. But we honestly believe that he could not have gotten better care from any other doctor than Dr. Rivera. He didn't push my father away because he could not pay. He treated him with honesty, dignity, love and kindness. He was always right there when my father needed him day or night. He would sit and talk, not rush in and rush out, but sit and listen and talk about anything, whether it was important or not. Dr. Rivera always tried to help him in any way he could. He was not just a doctor to my father but a close friend, too. He was willing to help my father in his claim to the Veterans Administration. My father was exposed to radiation during the testing of the A-bomb and Dr. Rivera believes his cancer could have been caused by the radiation. The night before my father died, Dr. Rivera stayed with my father trying to ease his pain and offering comfort to the family, answering all our questions truthfully and never holding anything back. Dr. Richard Rivera is an excellent doctor. He is a caring doctor and the poor people of Pueblo will lose great medical care if we lose him. The family of

Atomic Vet Knows Terror Of Radiation's Effects

Abe Arguello is eternally grateful for the love and care he gave to my father.