

PEOPLE

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PROFILE



CARLOS MORENO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Irene Cipriano led local council's successful fund drive

Irene Cipriano
■ National League of United
Latin-American Citizens

(LULAC) Woman of the Year
■ 'Children are my main concern,
because they're just starting out.'

Last Christmas, Irene Cipriano's group bought 86 pairs of shoes for children. This year, Cipriano is aiming for 500.

"Through your generosity and hard work," reads a certificate from President George Bush, "you have shown that the tradition of neighbor helping neighbor is alive and well in our country."

Bush recognized Cipriano, the president of LULAC Council No. 26, after she was named National LULAC Woman of the Year for her leadership of the council's annual shoe drive and other efforts on behalf of needy children.

"Children are my main concern, because they're just starting out and they're our future leaders," says Cipriano, the mother of four grown children. Her husband is Reynaldo Cipriano, an air conditioning technician.

Cipriano and Council 26 bought dress shoes — and socks — for children enrolled in the La Armada and Washington Head Start pre-school centers.

The fund-raising drive culminated last December in a shopping trip and party for the youngsters at Sunrise Mall.

"We took them straight to the shoe stores and let them try their shoes on," says Cipriano. "Then we gave them each their bag of candies and fruits.

"It was just a very happy occasion. Some children were dancing around in their new shoes. One little girl was trying to do a ballerina dance.

"We also provided new socks," says Cipriano. "One boy said 'Oh, boy! I get another pair of socks and I don't have to wear the dirty ones anymore!'"

Josie Gonzalez, 1st vice president of Council 26, also attended the party.

"There were some children who arrived with very worn-out tennis shoes and socks with holes in them," she recalls.

"One little boy jumped up and down and said, 'these shoes fit me just right, because the ones handed down from my brother are always too big or too small,'" Gonzalez says.

"It's something that really touches you," Cipriano says. "I hadn't realized 'til then that some of the children didn't even have socks. I felt good that we were able to help them."

Cipriano says she wants to provide 500 new pairs of shoes this year to include every Head Start child.

"I want to be able to provide shoes for children at all those centers."

Cipriano says Council 26 President Angelica Tovar was her inspiration.

"It was a challenge building the council up again, because it had been inactive," says Cipriano. "I helped her in that first year."

— By Marshall Anderson
— CALLER-TIMES STAFF WRITER