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NEIGHBORHOODS

La Causa names day care center after founder and activist Clementina Castro



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Keep Watching

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On Thursday, Feb. 5, [La Causa, Inc.](#), a nonprofit on Milwaukee's south side, renamed its building at 809 W. Greenfield Ave. in honor of the organization's founder and social justice advocate, Clementina Castro.

The building, now named the Clementina Castro Education Center, will continue to house the La Causa Early Education & Care Center.

Castro was an activist who was a part of Milwaukee's welfare rights movement. She was a champion of women's rights and highlighted the challenges faced by single mothers and low-income families.

When participating in marches and protests – including the fair housing marches alongside Father James Groppi – Castro's voice could be heard among the crowd shouting "viva la causa," or "long live the cause," which inspired the name of La Causa Inc.

She founded the nonprofit day care center in 1972 with a classroom of 17 students. Today, La Causa has grown to include a charter school, and a crisis nursery and respite center, among other services, according to Luis Ayala, CEO of La Causa.

"Our focus still remains today on children and families. We try to enrich that experience by providing these services," Ayala said. "It was all started through her vision."

Now, Ayala said the nonprofit is renaming its day care center building to remember the legacy of the activist and restate its commitment to her original mission – providing a space for students on the south side to grow and for families to come together to find strength and stability.

Ayala said he was inspired to highlight Castro's legacy when he attended Forest Home Cemetery and Arboretum's [Spirits of the Silent City tour](#), where actors honor the lives of those who are buried at the historic cemetery by dressing up as notable figures and sharing a creative retelling of their life stories.

While Castro often avoided the spotlight during her life, Ayala said that watching the retelling of her story inspired him to share it with younger generations through the renaming of the school.

"She took the mantle for civil rights and social justice, particularly at a time where Latinos were being discriminated against," Ayala said.

"We're slowly starting to integrate her story into the fabric of our culture so people can know the person and brains behind this ... It's a very inspiring story for kids of that age."



Thomas Castro, Clementina Castro's son, remembers walking alongside his mother in 1969 during the Welfare Mothers' March to Madison.

"It was amazing to see the group sing 'We Shall Overcome' as we marched to the Capitol," Thomas Castro said, through tears. "For our age, it looked like 100,000 people, because I was only thirteen."

Growing up, the Castro house was always filled with children – anyone in the neighborhood that didn't have a place to stay was welcomed into their home with open arms, Thomas Castro said.

When Thomas Castro heard the news that the day care center building would be renamed after his mother this February, he said, he remembers cheering and crying with his grandchildren and his wife, Sue Castro.

The memories of his life growing up on the south side of Milwaukee with his mother started to flow back, he said.

"I keep telling my husband that I hope he doesn't get struck by lightning," Sue Castro said, through laughs. "She was humble. She never wanted the recognition. She never wanted her name in the spotlight, but after her passing, we felt that it should be recognized."

Clementina Castro died in 2016, and since then, her family has been working to share her story.

Thomas Castro said he hopes the students who attend La Causa's day care and charter schools work hard and never give up on fighting for what they think is right.

"They are free," Thomas Castro said. "They have the knowledge to get out there and be somebody."

This story was updated to clarify that the building was renamed, not the education and care center. The update also includes the correct address for the Clementina Castro Education Center.

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