

Committee Chair Profile — Joe Zepeda

by Meta Levin

Like many, Joe Zepeda's introduction to ILCA was a personal one. Colleague Phil Donegan at Land and Lakes' recycling facility took him to a meeting three years ago. They attended the Legislative Luncheon and Zepeda was hooked. "It got me interested in volunteering," he says.

Last year, he joined the Spanish Programs Committee and this year, when Chair Catalino Mendoza stepped down, Zepeda stepped up.

"We need to get the Spanish-speaking community more involved and educated," says Zepeda. One of his first goals is to work with his committee to review current programs, analyzing what has been successful, what hasn't,

as well as the needs of the audience. "We'll go from there," he says.



Education is important to Zepeda. Land and Lakes hired him 13 years ago as a laborer. But, over the years, "the

owners have given me a great opportunity to broaden my knowledge and move up within the company," he says. He moved from a laborer to driving a truck for the hauling division. Eventually he earned a promotion to supervisor, then assistant operations manager in the landscape waste recycling division when Donegan was ready to retire.

Along the way, he learned to appreciate the value of an education, earning an Associate's degree in business management supervision from Joliet Junior College. Now he's enrolled at Louis University in a two-year program to earn a Bachelor of business administration degree. "Jim Cowhey, the president of the company, motivated me and gave me all of these

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opportunities," says Zepeda.

A Joliet native and a graduate of Joliet Central High School, Zepeda admits that the necessity of supporting a family outweighed furthering his education. Once he began to get more responsibility at work and understand the value, however, he took action, enrolling at Joliet Junior College with his boss' encouragement. "I couldn't do it without the Cowhey family," he says.

With a reserve of willpower and determination, Zepeda has set several goals for himself — one of the most important is to earn his Bachelor's degree within two years. "Once I make a commitment, I stick with it," he says. That includes chairing the Spanish Committee.

Zepeda is married to his high school sweetheart, whom he met, not in the



halls between classes, but at McDonald's where they both worked part time.

Zepeda had been promoted to manager when Irma walked through the door — a new hire. They started dating, have been married for 16 years and have three children: a 16-year-old son, who wants to go into medicine, an eight-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son.

In his spare time, Zepeda serves as a volunteer softball coach for his daughter's team and, until recently, coached his son's youth baseball team. In fact, he used to play softball, but, he says, "As company and family responsibilities became more important, I no longer had the time." He is, however, an ardent Cubs fan.

Although hectic, life is good for Zepeda right now. "I love waking up and going to work," he says. ☞



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