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Voices of Resilience: Uniting for Change

By Alicia Martinez-Vargas

In the heart of Walnut Park, an unincorporated community of 16,036 residents, exists a community bound by resilience and shared vision for change. At the forefront of this movement stands Mr. Salvador Diaz, a tireless advocate for community engagement and empowerment. Mr. Diaz has been a community organizer and advocate for decades, among his work is serving as health ambassador for the Southeast Los Angeles (SELA) Health Allies group of AltaMed, a community organization comprised of SELA residents. The group's purpose is to build collective power to advocate for equitable changes to improve community health. In recent years, the group has raised awareness about the impact of sugary beverages on oral health and advocated for equitable access to healthy foods and healthcare.

Living in Walnut Park for 47 years, Mr. Diaz has witnessed the stark disparities that affected his neighborhood. Resources flowed into affluent areas, while his own community struggled to access the most basic necessities, including nutritious food, recreational space, and safe neighborhoods. Driven by a desire to enact change, Mr. Diaz recalls the humble beginnings of his efforts, organizing meetings in the homes and garages of his fellow neighbors. "We began with just fifteen people, sharing stories of our community's needs and dreams," he stated. Those gatherings ignited a spark and determination to demand better for their community.

As their numbers grew, so did their ambitions. Mr. Diaz reached out to assembly members, local officials, and representatives, advocating for the needs of his community. Their united voices began to resonate and through collective action they spearheaded transformative changes in Walnut Park. They advocated for essential resources, including recreational spaces and access to nutritious food. Their relentless advocacy prevailed, culminating in the inauguration of Nogales Park, a symbol of resilience and community unity.

As our conversation turned to fostering greater community activation, Mr. Diaz emphasized the importance of knowledge and empowerment. "Information is power. By ensuring that every resident knows about available resources and how to access them, we can empower our community to thrive." With tears in his eyes and a quavering voice, Mr. Diaz acknowledged the barriers that many face, including the struggle to balance multiple jobs and family responsibilities. "Time is precious, but by coming together as a community, we can overcome these obstacles and ensure that no one is left behind."

As our conversation ended, Mr. Diaz expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to collaborate with organizations like the LA County Department of Public Health Community Public Health Team (CPHT). "United, we can make a difference, together, we can build a brighter future for Walnut Park and beyond." He is eager to work and support the work of the SELA Florece CPHT, stating that this pilot project will ensure that communities and families are connected to the health care and social service support they may need. Mr. Diaz and his fellow community members stand as beacons of hope, inspiring others to join them on the journey towards a better tomorrow.

Watch the full interview [here](#).



Salvador Diaz and his wife, Norma Diaz

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