

# Foundation recognizes tireless youth worker

By **BRIAN SEALS**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

For a story about Otilio Quintero, you could ask all the typical reporter-type questions like why does he do the kind of work he does or what does he like about his job.

But just following the guy known as "O.T." around the grounds of Barrios Unidos on the city's Eastside will offer a glimpse of his **SANTA CRUZ** enthusiasm and work.

"The original focus was to help our kids be safe here in Santa Cruz," Quintero said on a recent morning, standing near a mural depicting Beach Flats in the late 1970s, painted on the back wall of the group's office. "We wound up creating a movement."

For the work he does with Barrios Unidos, the press-shy Quintero has been honored with the 2005 California Peace Prize from the California Wellness Foundation. The honor is one of three bestowed in the state and carries a \$25,000 prize. "I've never won anything," he told a group of students Thursday. "If I have a scratch-off game, I scratch the wrong side."

Walking around the Barrios Unidos property on Soquel Avenue, Quintero is quick to talk about the plethora of activity at the site. Barrios Unidos is dedicated to helping youth overcome poverty and the social ills that can come along with it.

It does that by offering community outreach, youth development and economic development.

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**OTILIO QUINTERO ON BARRIOS UNIDOS, AFTER LANDING A \$25,000 AWARD**

School for Social Change at the site, a computer lab, neighborhood education and recreation efforts and operating a silk-screen shop with clientele ranging from U.S. Rep. Sam Farr to the Beastie Boys.

That operation grew from graffiti, something Quintero said he and others saw as art.

"We said let's take that art, put it on a T shirt and make some money," he said.

Activities aside, Quintero said working with youth today begins with spirituality. He said when kids are dealing with poverty, violence and even death, the first point is to enliven their spirit and culture.

"That's what the essence of the peace movement is about — trying to feed that spirit," he said.

Normally, Quintero is happy to be a behind-the-scenes kind of guy. He's quick to introduce co-workers and laud them for their work.

However, his efforts make the organization successful, said executive director Daniel "Name" Alejandre.

"We're honored our bro is being honored him-

self," Alejandre said. "Without O.T., Barrios Unidos wouldn't be where it's at."

While Quintero is accepting his award Wednesday in San Francisco, Alejandre will be in Washington, D.C., to pick up an award to Barrios Unidos from the Institute of Policy Studies.

In honoring Quintero, the California Wellness Foundation cited Quintero's work in lobbying for creation of the state's Gang, Crime and Violence Prevention Program in 1996, which has resulted in \$10 million being directed to grassroots anti-violence and helping to establish Barrios Unidos chapters in other areas.

Quintero's quest to help the impoverished began as he was growing up in a rural farm housing project west of Fresno.

As a teen, there was little to do in the area except alcohol, drugs and two kinds of speed — narcotic and driving. After watching many friends die and attending so many funerals, he realized he needed a change. His father moved the family to Mendota in 1975.

"I was one of the few that got out alive. It is a duty I have to those who didn't make it," he said of his work.

He has worked at Barrios Unidos since the formerly all-volunteer organization incorporated in 1993.

Quintero earned a bachelor of arts degree from UC Santa Cruz and a master's degree from San Jose State.

Contact **Brian Seals** at [bseals@santacruzsentinel.com](mailto:bseals@santacruzsentinel.com).



Dan Coyro/Sentine

Otilio 'O.T.' Quintero won a \$25,000 peace prize for his work with Latino youth through Barrios Unidos on the Santa Cruz Eastside.