

Businessman's book gala will benefit Hesed House

April 4, 2008

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North Aurora entrepreneur Robert Renteria worked hard for the things he has today: a thriving business, a sleek car, a beautiful home. And as he prepares to publish his first book, Renteria is eager to share that success with others.

"It's my hope that anyone in a power position reach out, because they can make a difference," he said. "As a leader of the community, I'm going to reach out and pull people upwards."



Robert Renteria

If you go

Robert Renteria will host a book launch and food drive at 7 p.m. April 25 at Long Island Sound, 1920 E. New York St., Aurora. Tickets are \$30. Visit www.fromthebarrio.com to reserve tickets or learn about corporate sponsorship options.

True to his word, Renteria has turned the launch for his autobiography, *From the Barrio to the Boardroom*, into a benefit for Aurora homeless ministry Hesed House. The red-carpet event will be held April 25 at Aurora's Long Island Sound, and the community is encouraged to attend. Guests are asked to donate cash, non-perishable food or discount store gift cards, and proceeds from a silent auction will also go toward Hesed House.

Helping the homeless is a cause that hits close to home for Renteria. Born in the slums of East Los Angeles, he watched the streets swallow his father, an alcoholic and drug addict who died on Skid Row when Renteria was a teenager. Renteria dropped out of high school and ran with teenagers who were involved with gangs until a plea from his grandfather spurred him to join the Army and straighten out his life.

Today, the 47-year-old owns a successful coin-laundry consulting business, WashPro USA, and sits on the board of the Aurora Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. A few years ago, he started mulling over the idea of writing his life story, hoping to inspire other teens to rise above their circumstances.

Renteria and his publishing company, Writers of the Round Table Press, have been distributing copies of *From the Barrio* to local schools and other groups.

"People ask him two questions: 'Are you for real?' And when they find out the answer is yes, 'Where have you been?'" publisher Corey Blake said. "He's an ordinary person who made a choice to do something extraordinary."

Renteria believes the best way to make an impact is to start from the ground up. He has spoken to students at schools in the East Aurora School District, and he was especially moved by the struggles of Hesed House's residents after Director Ryan Dowd gave him a tour a couple of months ago.

"It took me back in time with my father. It brought cold chills up and down my spine," he said. "Now, as an adult, I'm in a position to do something about it."

And though the book launch is for a good cause, plenty of fun is planned for the evening as well. A mariachi band, dancers and artists doing live paintings will entertain the crowd while they nibble on hors d'oeuvres.

Renteria hopes that parents will bring their children, and he's already given some tickets to schools and organizations for people who can't afford to go.

"I want them to see that there's more out there for them," he said, "and realize, maybe I could have this. This could be me."