

Special Communiqué from Provost Chaouki Abdallah

March 7, 2014

University of New Mexico

Tribute to Vicente Ximenes

Chicano civil rights leader

UNM Alum

UNM Honorary Doctorate Recipient

This week we honor the memory of Dr. (Honorary) Vicente Ximenes' seventy-year legacy of public service to advance education and civil rights in New Mexico, the United States, and the world. Over the course of his long career of public service, Vicente Ximenes was the exemplar of the citizen scholar who ethically and effectively exercised authority and leadership across academic, civic, and professional spheres. Dr. Ximenes passed away on Feb. 27, 2014 at the age of 94, after sixty years of affiliation with UNM beginning in 1947.

In 1951, Dr. Ximenes was the founder of the American G.I. Forum in New Mexico, a national-level veterans' rights group. Dr. Ximenes retired as an Air Force major and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal for combat duty in World War II. He served in the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson as U.S. Commissioner of Equal Employment (1967-1972), Chairman of the President's Cabinet Committee on Mexican American Affairs (1967-1969), and as Vice President for Field Operations for the National Urban Coalition (1972-1973). Dr. Ximenes' unparalleled contributions at the state and national-level distinguish him as one of the most influential figures in US civil rights history. Few leaders have had as far-reaching impact on the lives of the nation's youth in terms of equal opportunity in business, educational, and civic access. In New Mexico, Dr. Ximenes was the founder and chairman of New Mexico Youth Conservation Corps Commission. President Jimmy Carter appointed him Commissioner of White House Fellows (1977-1981), and Dr. Ximenes also received the Common Cause Public Service Achievement Award, Washington D.C. (1982) and the State of New Mexico Distinguished Service Award (1981).

Dr. Ximenes' education and career were deeply bound up with the University of New Mexico, having earned a BA in Education (1951) and an MA in Economics (1953), and having served as a research associate for the UNM Bureau of Business Research (1951-1961). UNM awarded Vicente Ximenes an Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters in 2008.

Later in life, through his collaboration with Dr. Michelle Kells (UNM Department of English), Dr. Ximenes served as an intellectual architect for the UNM Writing Across Communities initiative, recognizing the need for leaders skilled in rhetoric and writing to facilitate cultural, civic, educational, and economic development in New Mexico. He founded the Vicente Ximenes Scholarship in Public Rhetoric and Community Literacy to stimulate research and knowledge in language and literacy that can be utilized to improve human relations across social groups in the state. At least six Ximenes Scholarships have been awarded, and four of those recipients are currently finishing their doctoral dissertations. Dr. Ximenes also served as keynote speaker for the 2007 UNM Civil Rights Symposium, organized by Dr. Kells, who writes about his legacy in a forthcoming book chapter "Vicente Ximenes and LBJ's Great Society: The Rhetorical

Imagination of the American GI Forum.”

Michelle Kells notes, “Dr. Ximenes was my guide, my guardian angel, my professional advisor and an intellectual architect for Writing Across Communities at UNM. Trust me, the story of Mexican American civil rights begins and ends with Vicente Ximenes. The Chicano generation of the 1960s gave us no equal! Scholars in History and Political Science see that now.” Vicente Ximenes’ life and legacy demonstrate some of the best contributions of our public flagship university: empowering young people from diverse backgrounds through education, fostering their success in the world, *and* memorializing their contributions through research and scholarly writing.

A reception in honor of Dr. Vicente Ximenes and his legacy in New Mexico and nationally will be held on Fri., March 28, from 3-4:30 p.m. at the Southwest Hispanic Research Institute/Chicana Studies Building at 1829 Sigma Chi Road NE. For further information, contact Dr. Michelle Hall Kells at mkells@unm.edu.