

ABOUT SENDEROS

Senderos was created In 2001 when sisters Fe Silva-Robles and Dr. Nereida Robles Vásquez, indigenous oaxaqueñas, were working for Santa Cruz City Schools. They had come to Santa Cruz as adult immigrants not speaking English, so they understood the needs and challenges of families who come from Mexico or Central America seeking a better life for their children. They saw what immigrant youth were facing everyday - being bullied, tempted to join gangs or use drugs, hiding their cultural identity, and feeling “invisible.” They talked to parents who didn’t have the resources or access to after school activities for their children, or knew how to navigate the educational system. Using Fe’s background in dance they created an after school folkloric dance class, Centeotl Danza y Baile, to connect youth to their Mexican heritage and provide a safe, positive place to belong. Then they began creating community cultural events to provide that emotional connection to homeland, most notably the annual Vive Oaxaca Guelaguetza festival started in 2005, an indigenous music, dance, food, and arts festival like those held in Oaxaca, Ensamble Musical, an instrumental music program, was launched in 2014 through a collaboration Fe established with Centro de Integración Social #8, a public boarding school located in Oaxaca renowned for their banda de viento. Senderos partners with many community organizations and schools and performs at 20 events annually for over 10,000 audience members.

Underlying all of Senderos’s cultural arts programs is the drive to support first generation youth to attend higher education. The annual Latino Role Models Conference was created in 2010 in partnership with Cabrillo College, Santa Cruz County Office of Education and K-12 school districts, and the Mexican Consulate-San Jose to inspire, inform, and motivate youth to achieve their dreams for college and career. Dolores Huerta was the keynote speaker in 2022, and the March 2023 keynote speaker will be Chicana Latina Foundation’s first Executive Director, Olga Talamante. Responding to the needs of families, Plaza Comunitaria was created in 2012 as a center for adult learning and youth homework help. Since 2014 college scholarships are awarded annually to student participants. In 2017 Fe established a collaboration with UC Santa Cruz The Humanities Institute and Linguistics Department on a project called Nido de Lenguas to study and share the value of Oaxacan indigenous languages. In 2021 we began collaborating with UC Santa Cruz with the Corre la Voz educational mentoring program.

During the pandemic Fe and Nereida and Senderos volunteers stepped up to expand our services, partnering with the Community Foundation Santa Cruz County to distribute \$1.4 million in direct emergency cash assistance to low-income, undocumented families over 18 months. We also provided computer literacy training and virtual community meetings for Senderos families to access critical information and create a supportive place to share.

Senderos programs take place at schools, which are a safe and familiar environment for families. From the start Fe and Nereida made the commitment that all programs would be offered free of charge to enable equitable access to these types of enrichment activities. And importantly, all programs are conducted in Spanish, with English interpretation/translation as needed, to ensure access for monolingual participants and to encourage bilingualism and biliteracy. Senderos is currently transitioning from an all-volunteer organization to having paid staff to ensure our sustainability and success for the next 20+ years!

BRIEF BIOS

Fe Silva-Robles, Co-Founder, Volunteer Director

Fe is from Santiago Laxopa, a village nestled in Ixtlan in the Sierra Juarez mountains of Oaxaca, and she grew up speaking Zapotec, an indigenous language. She graduated from the Normal Rural "Vanguardia" of Tamazulapan, a public boarding school that molded her and taught her how to work in any environment and with all types of communities. Fe earned a degree as an elementary teacher with a minor in dance in Mexico. She learned Spanish in elementary school and learned English at 36 years of age when she moved to the USA. Fe worked for 21 years as a bilingual School-Community Coordinator for the Santa Cruz City School District. Fe co-founded Senderos with her sister Nereida in 2001. The City of Santa Cruz proclaimed May 12, 2021 as Fe Silva Day to honor her achievements and retirement. Fe's children are her inspiration and the ones who motivate her to continue the cultural movement she has started in California.

Nereida Robles, Ed.D., Co-Founder, Board Trustee

Nereida was born in Santiago Laxopa, Ixtlan, Oaxaca and immigrated to the United States when she was 22 years old. Nereida learned English at Adult Education, earned an AS at Cabrillo College, a BS in Psychology, Masters of Social Work, and Doctorate in Educational Leadership from San Jose State University. For the last 22 years she has worked for Santa Cruz City Schools, currently as a bilingual Social Worker. Nereida co-founded Senderos with her sister Fe in 2001. Nereida is an inspiration for the Senderos community in encouraging the pursuit of lifelong learning. Nereida sees first-hand how Senderos has helped children at cognitive and emotional levels of development, since it promotes healthy families, encourages self-esteem, connection to cultural heritage, and more positive mechanisms of acculturation.

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