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An Evening with Dolores Huerta

Center for Identity and Inclusion

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Dolores Huerta still a motivating force at 92

SEP 30, 2022



Dolores Huerta

American labor leader and champion for women's rights Dolores Huerta returned Thursday to the place that ignited her passion for activism more than half a century ago when a University of the Pacific professor introduced her to prominent activist Fred Ross Sr.

"That is how I got started with civil rights work right here in Stockton," she said.

“I want to share with you something I learned in the third grade and I have never forgotten: We are one human race,” Huerta told attendees during a keynote event celebrating Latino Heritage Month at Pacific. “The only way we have survived on planet Earth is because we have been taking care of each other ... because we have protected each other, and that is what we have to do right now.”

Huerta hopes to inspire students to get engaged, especially through the voting process.

“We want to empower them and make them understand that they are fighting, not only for their own future, but for the future of our democracy in the United States of America,” Huerta said.

Huerta has spent her life fighting for the rights of farm workers and women. She founded the Agricultural Workers Association and later launched the National Farm Workers Association with Cesar Chavez, which later became the United Farm Workers of America.

She recently joined farm workers in Stockton as they marched from Delano to Sacramento in support of a bill to expand union rights for farm workers. Governor Gavin Newsom signed the groundbreaking legislation Wednesday.

“When (the farm workers) stopped here in Stockton it was just unbelievable ... People from Stockton had food for them. They had water for them all the way to Sacramento. So Stockton I am so proud of you. You did good,” she told a standing-room-only crowd.

Huerta grew up in south Stockton and went on to attend Delta College in the 1950s (then part of Pacific) where she earned her teaching credential. The university had a tremendous influence on her life by introducing her to the arts through talented performers who came to campus.

“It gave us that knowledge that we needed about music and about culture. There's so much richness here,” she said.

Huerta received an honorary doctoral degree from Pacific in 2010. In 2012 she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama. She remains committed to her work at the age of 92 as president of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, established in 2003

“I was very inspired and touched by her story,” said Daniela Ceballos, a first-year student at Pacific. “It was really incredible to see someone who was so important to this community, to my culture, to women’s rights and the whole nation right in front of my eyes,” Ceballos said.

The event drew people from the community, including Delta College student Grace Hernandez. As a native of Stockton, Hernandez said she has admired Huerta since she

was a child.

“It has been a dream of mine to hear her speak,” she said. “I feel very empowered. I took notes on things she said and I’m excited to keep this with me as I further my journey in social justice.”