

HRC Award Profile: Mike Chavez

Mike Chavez's passion for equity stems from a lineage of volunteerism. Along with community members, his grandfather, Pete Chavez, was instrumental in making Buckingham Park a reality in Fort Collins. His mother, Carmen Chavez, volunteered with the Buckingham Center, which serviced the Buckingham, Andersonville, and Alta Vista communities. Mike, a Poudre Fire firefighter, also credits the mid-70s Chicano Movement for giving him a greater sense of pride in his identity. "I was told I come from 'Aztec Kings and Mayan Queens,'" he said, that the movement exposed him "not only to social injustice but to what social justice should look like."

Mike says equity work takes "time, energy, and thick skin." And while it could be disheartening to interact with people who are naïve to the inequities of others, Mike finds gratification and amazement in those moments where people "get it," where "their eyes are opened to something that they never realized existed."

He says he knows that when working with marginalized communities, much is often out of his control. With a positive attitude, he keeps himself open to participating in any situation and retains his seat at the table. This is crucial in his commitment to making sure often forgotten voices are heard and elevated so that they can participate in conversations that affect their lives and their community. "Having a better understanding of other cultures allows us to better serve the entire community to the best of our abilities," Mike says.

Mike's dedication to service and his passion for equity work within his community blends into his work for Poudre Fire Authority, whose workforce boasts more than double the national average of female firefighters. Inspired by his role with the Citywide Equity and Inclusion Committee, Mike is in the process of establishing a Diversity and Inclusion Committee within PFA.