Bend Up Close: Augustine Flores

by K_Guice

Augustine Flores has lived a life of great diversity. At the mere age of 32 he has gone from serving as a juvenile correctional counselor to owning multiple successful businesses in Bend.

Flores at his store, LA Hookup Flores is part owner of The Grove Restaurant & Nightclub, 1033 NW Bond St. LA Hookup, 1740 NW Pence Lane, # 4 The East Los Angeles native is the owner of LA Hookup, part owner in The Grove Restaurant & Nightclub and partner in the Hotshots, an International Basketball League team.

It is a far cry from where Flores grew up, in an impoverished neighborhood. â€œIn East L.A. everyone was poor, so I didnâ€™t think anything of it,â€• he said. However, it did afford him for many life lessons.

One of the most important things he learned was to be proud of himself and his heritage. â€œI take pride in my culture,â€• he said. â€œIâ€™m very proud to be Mexican.â€• Though right now, he says it is a difficult time with so many immigration issues.

Growing up in the poverty-stricken area, Flores also learned what he didnâ€™t want his life to be like.

â€œMy father wanted us out of East Los Angeles,â€• he said. â€œHe didnâ€™t want us growing up in gangs like he did. He didnâ€™t want me in and out of juvi and later in and out of the state penitentiary like he was.â€•

So, at the age of 13, his family moved to Washington. Initially, Flores said it was a big change, but a good change. â€œI am just thankful for the opportunity to get out of there.â€•

After he graduated from high school, Flores enlisted in the United States Marine Corp from 1992-1996. â€œIt was a great time, a great experience.â€•

Flores worked with Operation Restore Hope, he was stationed in Okinawa, Japan for a year and it was there he learned more life lessons.

â€œI learned that growing up in the United States of America is the best,â€• he said. â€œI also learned Americans arenâ€™t as liked as much as they think they are.â€•

When Flores got out of the service he made the move to Bend. His mother had moved to the area several years after his parents divorced. â€œShe had driven through Bend and stayed here when she would make trips from L.A. to Washington to come up and see me,â€• he said.

Flores followed in her footsteps and has now been in Bend for 10 years. Like many of his other life endeavors he jumped in with both feet and got involved in the community.

He began working with kids as a juvenile correctional counselor and minority liaison at Ochoco Youth Correctional Facility. In addition, he enrolled in Central Oregon Community College where he earned his associateâ€™s degree in criminal justice in 2000.

â€œI connected well with kids,â€• Flores said. â€œI would tell them, â€˜Itâ€™s sad to see you are wasting the best years of your life. Youâ€™re missing prom, your homecoming, dating. Youâ€™re missing all the great opportunities out there.â€™â€•

He utilized his past to try to help kids understand that he identified with them and steer them in the right direction. â€œI loved doing what I did,â€• he said.

During that time, Flores also decided to throw his hat into the political arena to help bring about change in the city he had come to love. In 2000, 26 years old, he ran for the city council.

â€œThis is my community,â€• he said, â€œI saw some things that needed to be worked on and felt like I could help.â€• During his campaign, Flores brought up issues like the need for public transportation and affordable housing.

As for future political plans, Flores says thatâ€™s on the back burner. â€œI am focusing on business, but I do support and donate to a lot of groups and I am still behind the scenes,â€• he said.

A couple years later, life offered Flores a twist. Due to state budget cuts, the youth correctional facility was

shut down. The state offered to transfer him, but he declined.

â€œTwo things happened,â€• he said. â€œI kind of saw the writing on the wall and that is when I had an opportunity to become a partner in The Grove.â€•

That was the influence he needed to stay. â€œI thought, I have a home and I am part of this great business and great restaurant,â€• he said.

Meanwhile, he took on another job he was passionate about, unions and peopleâ€™s rights. â€œI was a union rep for SEIU (Service Employees International Union) from 2003-2005,â€• Flores said. â€œUpon leaving the state, I become a rep for the same union that represented me.â€•

It was something he strongly believed in. â€œMy father was a steel worker. My grandmother was in a union,â€• he said. â€œSo, I grew up in a union household.â€•

Working with the union gave him a true understanding and appreciation for individualâ€™s rights, workersâ€™ rights and protection. All lessons he continues to utilize as a business owner today.

While working with the SEIU and The Grove, he began planning his next venture. Flores had come up with the concept to create an affordable clothing store in Bend with a connection to his childhood city.

â€œLA Hookup opened a year ago on July 31 of 2005,â€• Flores said with pride. The store caters to men and women 13 to 63 with a little bit of everything. The big hook is that everything in the store is $35 or less.

â€œNot growing up with a lot and having four kids in the family, I knew how hard it was to raise a family and feed them and clothe them,â€• he added. â€œSo, I wanted to be able to bring stuff to the community that was fun and affordable.â€•

The name of the store was inspired by the origins of the clothes. â€œI go back to L.A. every two months to get new merchandise for the store,â€• he said.

It allows Flores to do two things. He is able to find great fashion choices and keep cost down. Plus, he can check on his grandmother who lives alone in L.A.

In addition, when Flores goes back he realizes how lucky he is. â€œI go to L.A. and I see these young guysâ€¦ they think L.A. is everything,â€• he said. â€œThey donâ€™t realize there are other things out there.â€•

It makes him appreciate all of the opportunities Bend has to offer all the more.

One of Flores' most recent endeavors is becoming a partner in the Central Oregon Hotshots. â€œI own part of them and I work with my other partners developing affordable, fun entertainment for families,â€• he said.

â€œI love sports, I played sports in high school and I think itâ€™s a great thing for the community,â€• Flores said.

The team is made up of players from all of the country. â€œWe have guys from Pennsylvania, Florida and we have some great local talent,â€• he added.

The guys playing arenâ€™t primadonnas. â€œThese guys are busting their butts so the crowd can have a good timeâ€¦ itâ€™s for the fans,â€• he said.

As important as the entertainment factor, he wanted it to be inexpensive for families. Tickets for adults are $8, seniors are $6 and kids are $4. â€œThe best part is seeing families come to the game, having a good time and kids smiling and laughing.â€•

It is also something Flores can enjoy with his own pride and joy, his 13-year-old son, when he visits from Washington and his new bride, Dawn.

In between his three business ventures and volunteering for a long list of organizations, Flores found time to get married in April of 2006. He says his wife has made his life even better in Bend.

â€œIâ€™ve been blessed,â€• he said. â€œThere are a lot of people who helped me along the way, believed in me and saw things in me that I didnâ€™t see inside myself.â€•

It is a lesson he tries to pass on every day. â€œIf you see someone down, give them a hand,â€• Flores said. â€œEspecially kids, they need a little encouragement.â€•

However, Flores says you canâ€™t rely solely on others or use life excuses as a crutch.

â€œI could have given up at anytime,â€• he said. â€œSo, donâ€™t take no for an answer and keep trying everything. I put my mind to something; I keep doing it and if you have a positive attitude and keep striving for what you want, you can succeed.â€•

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