

WISCONSIN WOMEN MAKING HISTORY

THEIR STORIES OUR LEGACY

www.womeninwisconsin.org



ANITA HERRERA

1935-2019

City: Kenosha, Madison, Racine

County: Dane, Kenosha, Racine

Anita Herrera grew up in a family of migrant farm workers and devoted her career to improving education, employment, and living conditions for people of color in Wisconsin.

Anita Herrera was born in San Antonio, Texas, in 1935. She was the 7th in a family of 9 children whose parents had also been born in Texas; their grandparents were born in Mexico. When Anita was 6 years old, her family became migrant farm workers. For 9 years they traveled back and forth between Texas and Wisconsin, but Anita's father became ill, so in 1951 they decided to stay in Wisconsin to get better health care for him. To this day, however, the family still owns property in Texas.

As a child Anita worked in the fields with her family, picking fruits and vegetables. When she started ninth grade, they were living out in the country, and she had to walk a mile to get to and from the bus that went to her high school in Kenosha. Her mother was afraid for her to be walking by herself and told her she could quit school, but Anita was determined to improve her life by continuing her education. When winter weather made it difficult to live in the poorly insulated housing for migrant workers near Kenosha, the family moved to Racine, where Anita attended racially integrated inner-city schools and "embraced everyone that was around me." She then went to Dominican College of Racine for a year before getting married and starting a family. After all of her five children had started school, she finished her bachelor's degree and also a master's degree.

Herrera directed the Spanish Center of Racine, Kenosha, and Walworth Counties, where she was an advocate for employment opportunities for Latin@s, African Americans, and others. In 1980 she became the Governor's Advisor on Ethnic and Minority Initiatives, where she worked with Latin@, African American, American Indian, and Asian advisory councils. Later she directed a weatherization program for the Racine Spanish Center. In the 1990s she returned to Madison, where she was the director of development and training for the Wisconsin Education Association Council and helped start Madison's first bilingual charter school. Herrera once said that she was proud to have been "a role model for young people who are going to become leaders."

Herrera wanted other people to know that "you have to work hard, and you have to treat everybody with respect, and you have to deal with people being people, and you have to have fun along the way."

Anita Herrera passed away peacefully in her home on July 27, 2019.

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/anita-herrera