

Message from Eddie Berrones:

'My heart is in Homestead'

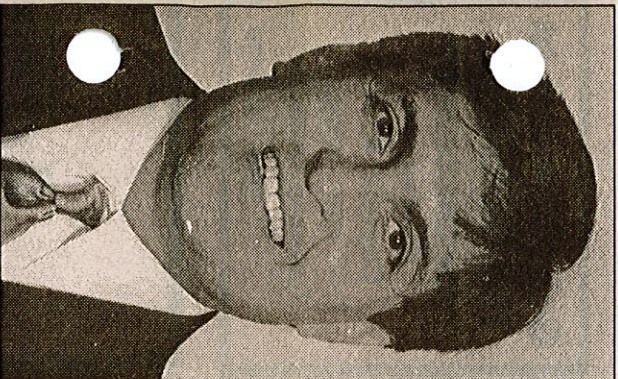
By **EDDIE BERRONES**

The following is an open letter to the residents of Homestead.

My work as a city of Homestead councilman for the last six years has been a rewarding, often exhilarating and sometimes a frustrating experience. I tender my resignation with some regret, but look forward to my future opportunities. While I am proud of being the first Mexican American elected to the Homestead Council, I have been a successful councilman for *all* of the people of Homestead.

Over and over again it became clear to me that I as a voice, often the single voice, for citizens who previously went unheard and unnoticed. Because I always viewed myself as a public servant, rather than merely an elected official, I listened to all my constituents and, when appropriate, advocated for and with them with honesty and integrity.

My service to the city of Homestead was a labor of love. After Hurricane Andrew, many people thought that our situation was hopeless and that we would never be a viable city. Many simply left. For those of us who stayed, I am pleased that I and my colleagues on the council worked hard and contributed to the growth and development of Homestead. Because I have always believed in Homestead's potential for being a major city in South Florida, I worked diligently to contribute to the financial stability of the city and to enhance its educational



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opportunities. As we all remember, the city was faced with a serious financial crisis in 2001. As chairman of the Finance Committee, I was fortunate to have the guidance of Merrett Stierheim in developing viable solutions to the crisis. While I was

outspoken and aggressive about solving the crisis, I was always mindful that decisions made by the council have economic consequences for all residents and businesses in the city. The result is that the city's financial balance sheet is in far better condition than it was two years ago.

My other great interest has and will continue to be education. In response to constant requests from parents and businesses regarding the growing need for educational opportunities for Homestead residents, I worked hard and provided leadership in the development of the Keys Gate Charter School which opened in August of this year. My commitment to the school remains strong and I predict that Keys Gate Charter School will prove to be one of the finest elementary schools in all of Dade County.

As the executive director of Le Jardin Community Center Inc., I lead the change of the mission of day care in our community. Le Jardin built three state-of-the-art schools, provided the opportunities for college degrees for teachers, provided certification programs for parents leading to employment and helped prepare more than 2,000 of Homestead's youngest members for a life of educational excellence. In six years we have become an educational program for infants, toddlers and preschoolers and Le Jardin is now one of the largest employers in the city of Homestead.

To the residents of Homestead I say the following: As you did with me, continue to make your voices, opinions and desires known to the council. Keep informed about decisions being made and understand the consequences of the council's decisions. Talk with your neighbors to be sure that there is consensus for decisions. Remember that the decisions made by the council will have long lasting financial and environmental effects on you, your families, the local businesses and the city as a whole.

On a personal note, I want the residents of Homestead to know how much I appreciate the opportunities given to me. Thank you. I hope I have been an example not only to Hispanic residents but also to members of other minority groups, and that they will be encouraged to seek elected office in this community. I also hope that the resident of the city will give other minority residents the opportunity to serve as I have had. I have lived in Homestead for more than 30 years, I went to school here, my daughters were born here, many of my family members live here and my heart is here. I will always care about Homestead.

Thank you and farewell.