

COMMUNITY HERO | Lisa Montesana is building a hub of hope in Beaverton

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By Fox Perez

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(Left to right) Liliana Palacios, Lisa Montesana and Ben Reyes stand in front of Diego Rivera artwork. Palacios and Reyes are both Community Health Workers (CHWs) with the Beaverton Resource Center. (Fox Perez/News-Times)

Lisa Montesana creates a lifeline through the Beaverton Resource Center

(BEAVERTON) — On any given weekday, families stream into the Beaverton Resource Center seeking help with groceries, rent assistance or medical care. At the center of it all is Lisa Montesana, who co-founded the nonprofit five years ago and now serves as its executive director.

What began as a small idea between Montesana and Co-Founder Al Schmitt has grown into a vital lifeline for thousands of Washington County residents.

Before Beaverton, Montesana lived in Texas, where she and her family had their own experiences struggling to stay afloat in the system.

Years and years ago, our family struggled with poverty and housing instability,” she said. “We were victims of a recession back in the ‘80s. We lost our home, our jobs... We were cleaning offices. I was working in a school, and we were catering. We had four kids, and we were doing anything and everything to make ends meet — and it just wasn’t working. It was exhausting.”

Montesana’s husband was offered a job in Oregon, so the family packed their bags and came to Beaverton, where Montesana began working for the school district.

“I’ve always believed in volunteer work, so I took a position as a VISTA, which is part of AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America in the Beaverton School District, helping to develop the early childhood literacy program,” she said. “Then the district hired me, and I’ve worked in all grade levels and in special (education). In 2004, I landed the position as McKinney-Vento liaison, and then became a program coordinator, and worked that until I retired.”

Montesana also served as homeless liaison at the Beaverton School District’s Family Resource Center, which closed its doors in 2014 due to loss of county funding. The closure of this and similar resource centers in the region led to a domino effect of folks seeking services.

“Al and myself, we both saw the impact (a lack of resource centers) had on our community, and it was significant,” Montesana said. “The resource centers all provide prevention services for people navigating poverty. So we’re hoping to prevent people from sliding through the cracks, losing their housing and to move forward with their lives.

“We’re just two friends that got together and decided to bring this back to our community, and we worked on it for seven years,” she continued. “In 2020, we opened it right during the pandemic, and neither one of us could believe it.”

During the pandemic, Montesana guided the center through an abrupt shift to vital resources, ensuring families still had access to critical support. The center now provides a wide range of services: emergency food through local pantries, limited rent and utility assistance, access to health screenings and Oregon Health Plan registration, and even job fairs for people seeking work. In 2024 alone, the nonprofit helped more than 10,000 people with meals, financial aid and health care resources.

Montesana's efforts have not gone unnoticed. Earlier this year, the center received the 2025 Best of Beaverton Award for its work in addressing food insecurity and basic needs.

"The Better Beaverton Award is given to an organization or initiative that has made a profound impact on our community, helping to improve the lives of our neighbors in meaningful and lasting ways," Councilor Ashley Hartmeier-Prigg said at the award ceremony. "This year's recipient truly embodies that spirit. ...The Beaverton Resource Center has been a lifeline for many in our city, providing essential support for our underserved residents."

Still, for Montesana, recognition is secondary to results.

Looking ahead, Montesana says the center plans to expand programs to meet growing demand. As Beaverton continues to change, she hopes the center will remain a steady hand for anyone who needs it.

"We'd love to see the state bring back community resource centers that allow people to help each other. It's the organizational infrastructure that allows your ordinary, everyday person to step in and help their neighbor in a safe and secure way," she said.

Lisa Montesana

Community: Beaverton

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