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Guest Opinion

Change machismo mindset

By Dan Benavidez

The extent of domestic violence within the Latino community is hard to determine on an exact scale; however, a rather significant part of the Latino culture, at least from my perspective and experience of it, generally looks at domestic violence as a private family issue. It might be said that it is considered acceptable or normal behavior within the culture.

There are a number of Latino men in our communities today who were brought up in a paternalistic society where the man is dominant and still believes that women have a subordinate place in the home. The men within a significant part of our culture still are raised with an attitude that we are automatically due the larger portion of respect within the family. This mentality can create domination and what can look like ownership of the women within a particular segment of the Latino community.

I believe there also is a misunderstanding that the domestic violence occurring within our culture can be

Join campaign against domestic violence

attributed to the "machismo" mystique or myth. This is not necessarily true, because the term "machismo" also implies a man of honor, a man of respect and of bravery. We, as modern-day Latino males, must teach our children the true meaning of "machismo," that it is not acceptable for a man to be considered macho if he hits his wife, girlfriend or sister and that it is in the true spirit of "machismo" to honor and respect women. This will require a new learning on the part of the dominant male mindset that we are not automatically superior just because of our gender, and women are not personal possessions.

Domestic violence is not only against our laws; it also is not acceptable behavior among Latino

men of honor. One of my esteemed heroes, Emiliano Zapata, said: "It is better to die standing on your feet than to be living on your knees." With these words, he exemplified courage. Keeping his words in mind, I declare, "It is better to be men of honor than cowards who promote and practice domestic violence."

Therefore, I ask all Latino men to join me on Father's Day in a courageous campaign against domestic violence by wearing a white ribbon that you can pick up at the Daily Times-Call or the Longmont Police Department.

We should use this campaign as a time to spread the word, not only in our own Latino neighborhoods but in the entire Longmont community, and become examples of men of honor and strength; and to make it known that as men of honor and strength, we do not tolerate domestic violence against women or anyone within our families.

Dan Benavidez is a former Longmont City Council member and co-founder of the Latino advocacy group El Comité.