

Hispanic Heritage Month: Embracing My Culture and Heritage

Southwest Airlines is proud to recognize Cultural, Heritage, and Pride holidays throughout the year. These include nationally observed holidays and months of celebration that honor our Employees' diverse backgrounds, the diverse communities we serve, and our Company's community giving pillars. This #HispanicHeritageMonth, we're celebrating a valued member of the Southwest Family, Victor Villegas

I am a first-generation Mexican-American that grew up in a small town in South Texas called Rio Hondo, which is 8-miles away from Harlingen, the fourth city that Southwest Airlines began to serve in 1975. My parents immigrated to this country in the late '60s, and by the time I was two years old, they had divorced. My mother spoke very limited English, had a fifth-grade education, and did her best to provide for me and my older sister. Spanish was my first language and the only language that I spoke at home with my mom. As a child, I attended a Spanish-speaking church, listened to Spanish music, and watched Spanish television. This wasn't uncommon where I grew up—a lot of individuals in South Texas had emigrated from Mexico and spoke limited English or did not speak English at all. But speaking Spanish was somewhat of a divider—if you spoke Spanish, it usually meant that your parents didn't speak English. It wasn't uncommon for parents who grew up speaking both languages to want their children to learn English only.



Victor riding in the jumpseat; one of his favorite things to do! Victor riding in the jumpseat; one of his favorite things to do!

I was often embarrassed that my mom didn't speak English, and I resented the Spanish programs, music, and church service experiences growing up. I didn't realize that Spanish was a part of my culture and would help shape me into the person I am today.

The summer after fourth grade, I took my very first flight on Southwest Airlines to Dallas (Love Field). It was my first time on an airplane, and I fell in love with aviation and with the People of Southwest. I knew that I wanted a job working in the airline industry—and I knew I wanted to work for Southwest. My first dream was to be a Flight Attendant, as the one I met on my flight (I remember her name was Randi and she was so kind) made a lasting impression on me. I started to research a career as a Flight Attendant and I learned that being Bilingual was a benefit—airlines flew to all destinations, including countries where the primary language was Spanish.

As I grew up, I realized the benefits of embracing my culture and heritage, and who I was. In high school, knowing two languages helped me ace my Spanish classes that were required to graduate. When Selena's music became popular amongst my high school classmates, I was able to sing along and never mess up any of the lyrics (hitting the notes and pitch was an entire story altogether). I also learned the importance of culture and heritage. Although I never became a Flight Attendant, I eventually became a Bilingual elementary school teacher, and understanding the culture and customs of my students helped me to foster relationships with them, as well as with their parents.



Victor preparing for his hooding ceremony and virtual graduation to celebrate his Doctor of Education Victor preparing for his hooding ceremony and virtual graduation to celebrate his Doctor of Education

My career journey eventually led me to Southwest Airlines where I started as a Strategic Learning Partner working within Southwest Airlines University. After two years, I was selected to work as a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Business Consultant, where I am responsible for providing resources to Employees and Leaders on DEI, and ensuring that our Employees feel valued, cared for, and appreciated.



Victor at his first SWA Rally with his partner, Jason, in PHX
Victor at his first SWA Rally with his partner, Jason, in PHX

I continue to embrace my Hispanic culture and heritage by passing along the traditions and celebrations to my nephew and nieces. This past summer, I learned how to make homemade flour tortillas. I've also enjoyed sharing cultural experiences portrayed in movies like *Coco* and discussing the celebration of *Dia de Los Muertos*. I still sing and dance to songs by Selena, as well as music by other Latin artists such as Jennifer Lopez, Shakira, and the legends like Celia Cruz and Gloria Estefan.



Victor at the Frontiers of Flight Museum with his partner and his nieces and nephew
Victor at the Frontiers of Flight Museum with his partner and his nieces and nephew

I enjoy watching Spanish programming, like House of Flowers (La Casa de las Flores), Money Heist (La Casa de Papel), and Cable Girls (Las Chicas del Cable) in original audio (although at times the captions do help me with context).

All these things are an important part and who I am – a proud member of the Latino and LGBTQ+ community who has learned to embrace my culture and heritage.

Book now at [Southwest.com](https://www.southwest.com) to explore the many cultural experiences found in our many travel destinations.

For more on DEI, check out [Honoring Black History Month](#), [An Employee's Take on Asian Cuisine, Culture, and the Need for Unity](#), [Taking PRIDE in our Diverse Suppliers](#), and [Join us! Southwest Named "Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion"](#).