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Martin Sheen receives Chavez Award

HONOR: Actor recounts how late labor activist provided strength, hope

By J. Sharon Yee

Daily Bruin Senior Staff

Actor Martin Sheen was presented with the first Cesar E. Chavez Spirit Award Friday at a luncheon celebration honoring the late labor rights activist on what would have been his 73rd birthday.

Chavez, one of the nation's foremost leaders of organized labor and founder of the National Farm Workers' Association, practiced non-violent strikes and pickets to promote higher wages and better work conditions for farm workers.

Sheen, who was a longtime friend and supporter of Chavez, and is an activist on behalf of the Latino community, the homeless and farm workers, accepted the award with gratitude and praised Chavez's legacy.

"Cesar was more than a labor rights activist - he was also an environmentalist and a spiritual leader," Sheen said. "I know if he were here today, he'd tell students to stay in school, finish and then serve the world."

Sheen, who can be currently seen on television as the president of the United States in the NBC series, "The West Wing," also expressed a desire to "return a blessing" by installing the trophy at



NICOLE MILLER/Daily Bruin

Martin Sheen talks with **Linda Alvarez** at the ceremony in which he received the Cesar Chavez Spirit Award on Friday.

the headquarters for United Farm Workers in central California.

Mistress of ceremonies Linda Alvarez, a UCLA alumna and KCBS-Channel 2 news anchor, opened the ceremony by praising Chavez's legacy.

"What inspires me and motivates me the most is when I hear of someone who has a mission, is driven by something he believes in, and no one exemplified that more than Cesar Chavez," she said.

Joseph Torrenueva, a friend of Sheen for nearly 40 years, talked about attending an anti-nuclear demonstration with Sheen, at which both were arrested.

"That is an example of how Martin makes me a better man," Torrenueva said. "I once asked Martin why he does the things he does, and he told me when you die, you have no one to answer for you except yourself."

Prior to the presentation of the Spirit Award, Reynaldo Macias, chairman of the Chavez Center for Chicana and Chicano Studies, which co-sponsored the event with several other campus organizations, announced the establishment of a scholarship fund for UCLA undergraduates who have demonstrated a strong commitment to activism in the Latino community.

Macias spoke about Chavez's influence in the creation of the center.

"It is in our work that the spirit of Cesar Chavez is reflected, and in our students where it lives," he said.

This year, the center has enrolled 1,300 students in 54 academic courses, which is a 30 percent increase from last year, Macias said.

Chancellor Albert Carnesale praised the efforts of the center, which was established two months after Chavez's death in 1993.

"It has grown in every way, not just in size, but in

stature, its preparation of future leaders, and contribution to the reputation of the university," Carnesale said.

Notable guests at the luncheon included state senators Hilda Solis (D-El Monte) and Richard Polanco (D-Los Angeles), former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros, and University of Texas at San Antonio President Ricardo Romo.

Solis and Polanco presented a certificate of recognition to Sheen at the end of the ceremony.

Moises Carlos, associate director of MBA admissions at the Anderson School at UCLA and attendee at the luncheon, said he was impressed by the presentation.

"My father worked in the fields, so the struggles Chavez fought against were also close to my family, and it's wonderful to see the progress that's been made so far," he said. "Sheen's words were very inspiring."

Torrenueva summed up the significance of the event in praising both Chavez and Sheen for their commitment to social justice.

"A true act of manliness is the sacrifice of ourselves for others in the non-violent struggle for justice," he said. "Those are words Cesar lived by and words that Martin continues to live by."

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