

Pepe Vargas personifies creativity, dedication and leadership. As Founder and Executive Director of the International Latino Cultural Center, he fosters the understanding of Latino culture through the universal language of the arts by showing, through our cultural expressions, that Latinos are defined by more than 20 different nationalities and come from all social and racial backgrounds.

In 1985, with a budget of \$10,000, an audience of 500 and 14 films projected on a wall, the Chicago Latino Film Festival was born. The Film Festival encompasses all nationalities of Latino culture and transports viewers across boundaries into the lives of others. 2017 marks the 33rd anniversary of the Chicago Latino Film Festival.

Under the direction of Vargas since 1986, the Chicago Latino Film Festival has evolved into the largest and best Latino film festival in the U.S. and is now Chicago's biggest International Latino cultural event. After 30 years, the Chicago Latino Film Festival is better than ever and its vitality is a story in itself. The audience has grown from 500 people in 1985 to more than 70,000 who enjoy the multinational cross-cultural exchanges offered every year by the Center.

Building on the success of the Film Festival, Vargas created the International Latino Cultural Center of Chicago to showcase the boundless multinational talent of Latino artists. The Center prides itself for its outstanding multidisciplinary and international cultural programming that includes a wide variety of art forms from Latin America, Spain, Portugal and the United States.

Pepe lives with his dream of building, in downtown Chicago, a world-class, state-of-the-art cultural complex that will allow us to share the visual and performing arts, language, music, comedy, poetry, films, the culinary arts and many other cultural expressions that reflect the lives of more than 600 million Latinos worldwide. This majestic place will be a point of encounter for all.

Vargas grew up in a small town in Colombia and in 1976 he received his degree in Law & Social Sciences from the National University of Buenos Aires, Argentina. In 1980, Vargas arrived in Chicago with only a few dollars in his pocket and without speaking much English. He studied at Columbia College Chicago and earned a degree in Broadcast Journalism & Television/Film production in 1985.

He has served as a juror in various film festivals in Latin America and Spain, and as a media panelist for several institutions including the Illinois Arts Council and the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, amongst others. He also served as a trustee of the Illinois Humanities Council.

He has received many recognitions and awards, including Chicago Tribune's Chicagoan of the Year 2003 and an Honorary Doctoral Degree from Lake Forest College. He was one of the two winners of the Chicago Community Trust 2006/7 Fellowship for Community Leaders, which allowed him to travel extensively through Latin America, Spain, France, and the United States visiting other cultural institutions. In 2011, the Chicago Tribune named Pepe Vargas as a Remarkable Person, and in December of 2015 Crain's Chicago featured him in their "Take Away" column.

