

President, Pilsen Alliance – Victoria Romero, Maria High School '89

Victoria Romero, 35, is a lifelong resident of Chicago's Pilsen community, a predominantly Mexican American neighborhood. Her parents migrated to Chicago in the 1950s from Mexico. Ms. Romero graduated from Maria High School in 1989. In 2004 she was inducted into the Maria High School Hall of Fame for her work with the SCA-Maria Alumnae Association, Maria's Mexican Scholarship Fund Committee, and the Chicago Department of Public Health as a Public Health Administrator.

"I feel strongly that Pilsen is part of my identity as a Mexican American woman," said Romero. In her youth, she said, "you could hear Mexican music playing right next to the hot dog joint, the cultural smells of tamales, hot Mexican chocolate. I don't want to lose that feeling of community."

Today Victoria is a community activist trying to save Pilsen from being gentrified. "Gentrification is the political and economic process to displace lower-income families from their houses and communities," she explained.

Residents of Pilsen, including Romero, held a candlelight vigil on Nov. 30, 2005, in front of a construction site for a 400-unit luxury condominium to mourn the potential loss of their neighborhood to a large-scale development plan. Many fear the project will displace working-class families.

Affordable housing is very much needed here, as elsewhere in Chicago, yet the plan to build luxury condos will only soak up valuable resources and put neighborhood housing out of financial reach for Pilsen families, critics say.



worth defending.

"I oppose this new condo unit," Romero said. "How are working-class families going to afford them? What we need is more green space for our children, another high school and community centers for our youth, as well as a viable option of affordable housing based on the median income of average working families."

Over 80 Pilsen residents, young, old, Black, Latino and white, gathered in the cold evening air to form a picket line with signs that read, "Progress without displacement!" and "Accesible para quién?" (Accessible for whom?). They shouted, "Pilsen is not for sale: Develop, don't displace!" Passing motorists honked their horns in support.

Victoria Romero is a rising star to many who are fighting for the rights of working families, immigrants and low-income communities. Pilsen is rich with Mexican culture, Latino traditions and a history of working-class values

