

## Santa Ana made a career of fighting discrimination

It is frequently acknowledged, but rarely spoken of in detail. Two men, working the same job for the same company, but bringing home a far different paycheck. The only difference between them is the color of their skin.

These days, such forms of racial discrimination are prohibited by federal law. But in the heyday of mining in southeastern Arizona, it was the status quo. A Mexican miner wouldn't make the same wage as the "gringo" working next to him. He would be passed over for bonus work. He would never be promoted to a supervisor's job ahead of a "white" man.

In those days, most of the Hispanic workers chose not to make waves about the unfair treatment because they had families to support and needed the work. And they knew there were others waiting in the wings, wanting to work in the mines, who could take their places in the blink of an eye.

But for Jose Maria "Joe" Santa Ana and his son Otto, fair was fair, and they weren't about to be treated in a way that was less than they deserved.

Otto, who was born in Miami and first went to work in the mines when he was 15, recalls a story told by his father about an encounter with a white mine boss at the Miami Copper Mine. Joe and another Hispanic man were working their job underground when they were approached by a white foreman who told them that they had to pay him 50 cents a day if they wanted to keep working there.

"My dad was the type of person who didn't take that from anyone," Otto explains. "He turned to walk away, and the foreman grabbed his arm." Joe told the foreman not to touch him, and the foreman taunted him with the standard, "What are you going to do about it?"

"So my dad beat the daylights out of him," Otto recalls with a laugh. "They fired my dad, which was a great thing for us. At that time the average miner at the age of 46 had silicosis, and you didn't live very long after that. Being that my dad knew about mining; he bought some claims, some of which we still have."

Joe also started his own business, chopping and selling wood to the county, which would then distribute it to residents who had no other way of heating their homes or cooking, because no natural gas lines had been installed at that time.

When Otto went to work in the mines, his father's story of discrimination was never far from his thoughts. But a job was a job.

The Castle Dome open-pit mine, on the south slope of Porphyry Mountain five miles west of Miami, was opened by the Castle Dome Copper Company, Inc. It was developed as a war project and, beginning in June 1943, produced about 4 million pounds of copper per month.

When the Castle Dome mine opened, Otto was a sophomore in high school. He and some friends decided to see if they could get a summer job at the new mine. At the time, Katie Weimer was the business agent for the mine. Weimer would later become Miami's first woman mayor in 1976.

Weimer hired the group of young men, who were paid 90 cents an hour. Otto and two of his friends chose to work through the summer and the next school year, not returning to high school until August the following year, which put them a year behind

their former peers. Despite the fact he would graduate a year later, Otto says the mine job was a good experience.

Three months after his 18th birthday, Otto enlisted in the Air Force. Most of his friends were joining one or another branch of the Armed Forces, and he didn't want to be left out. He signed on for an 18-month period. He had done some carpentry work while at Castle Dome, so the military made him a carpentry apprentice. He spent a year and a half in Japan, mostly serving as a duty sergeant.

When he returned to the United States, Otto attended an auto mechanics school in Globe for two years under the G.I. Bill. After he finished his training, jobs in the area were scarce, so he sought work in California. However, after only a few months of work at a car manufacturing plant, he was laid off and returned home to Miami.

His oldest brother was a machinist for a railroad company in Tucson and got him an apprenticeship there, where he worked for a year and a half. But his pay was little and his rent and other expenses were outpacing his wages. He petitioned the local union he had joined to let him transfer his apprenticeship as a machinist up to Miami for fleet work with the Sleeping Beauty Mine, another venture by the Castle Dome Copper Co. Otto moved back to Miami and waited for word of his transfer. Eventually the Union told him the transfer was approved, but when he contacted the general manager of the Miami mine, he was told that, "The machinists don't want Mexicans working in the machine shop."

"I was boiling mad," Otto recalls. "He [the general manager] said he had no intention of changing the situation. So I joined the local Teamsters. I worked hard and eventually I made a lot of changes."

One of the first changes he pushed for was allowing Hispanics to receive apprenticeships in all areas of mine work. "If you were Mexican, it was nearly impossible to get an apprenticeship, and when they did put you on the list, they would bypass you," he explains. "We worked hard to get a new contract with the mine that stipulated that apprenticeships would be open to all, not just whites, and that they would be awarded in the order they were assigned out, with no 'bypassing.'" That new policy met with a lot of resistance from the machinists and other mine bosses, but a contract was a contract.

"That was just the beginning of opening things for us," Otto says. "As I got to be a steward and a chief steward and a negotiator within the union, I had to put a stop to a lot of the unfair things that happened."

Otto helped to develop some safety innovations for the motor pool and started a program to teach people how to drive the trucks properly. He also negotiated to get air conditioning in the trucks, where the floorboards sometimes heated up enough to melt the soles of the driver's shoes.

Of the 100 men working as machinists for the mine, 98 of them were Teamsters members. Very few of them were white, since most of those men were foreman, not workers.

"Anything that involved moving equipment, we had a good stronghold," Otto says. "But it was really a fight to get them [mine bosses] to change the things that were so common. They didn't like Hispanics who talked back and stood up for their rights. That was one of my traits; I'd stand up to anyone."

Otto still is a staunch supporter of equality in mine employment, whether related to race or gender. "I wanted to make sure everybody got a fair deal," he said. "I was

proud to be a person who got involved. I was the only one of my family that didn't go to college, but I still really made a difference."