

Armando Mendoza

Inducted January 22, 2010

Armando Mendoza and Lawton and soccer are synonymous in Oklahoma. Whether it was coaching, Refereeing, or volunteering, the California native adopted the game of soccer while serving in the United States Army and became the man to contact for soccer in Lawton. Growing up in East Los Angeles, Armando played the usual sports of baseball, basketball, and football, but not soccer.

"My first exposure to soccer came when I was stationed in Germany and my father-in-law asked me to go with him to a football game." says Armando. Little did Armando realize that football in Germany is soccer. "I had never seen anything like that. The crowd, the flags, the singing, and the excitement got to me, and I was wrapped up in it right away"

Armando met and married his wife Christa while stationed in Germany and the three Mendoza children have three separate birthplaces: Tony, the oldest, was born in Vicenza, Italy. Michael was born in Wiesbaden Germany: and Christina was born in San Francisco. All three became soccer players and played for their dad. And now Armando works with his granddaughters Alexandria Mendoza and Jada Deen.

While serving his country Armando achieved his associate degree through the Army and worked in logistics during his 24 years of service. In addition to making certain supplies available to the troops, he became a member of the Army's airborne unit and a paratrooper. Asked if he ever sky dives, Armando replied: "No, because in Germany our pilot gave us the jump signal too early and we landed in German grapevines. I try not to jump out of perfectly good airplanes anymore."

Returning to Lawton in 1990 on a compassionate re-assignment due to his father's death, Armando and the family settled in Lawton and Armando began pursuing his dream of bringing the two soccer programs under the auspices of Oklahoma Soccer and US Youth Soccer. As of 2008 that dream became a reality. "The joining of the two groups was important to soccer development in Lawton, but the building of the Big Green complex with 35 fields by a Lawton businessman was significant.

Armando is proud of the Southwest Oklahoma Soccer Referee Association he helped found to train and guide referees in Lawton and the surrounding cities. He also points out that his family supported him in all his soccer endeavors and that Mike Mahoney was an early supporter of Armando and his dream.

Armando's vision continues as he works with the young people who will follow in his footsteps. "I tell them to keep working hard to make what you have better than how you found it and the club and program will continue to grow." As Lawton Soccer Club begins its fourth year, it will have Armando Mendoza to continue its growth and development.