



## Busy Father Discovers Family Haven at Museum

With four young daughters and his own business to run, life for Norberto Flores was a flurry of meetings, school events and soccer practices. In more than a decade in Kansas City, he had driven by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art dozens of times, but gone inside only once. So when a family friend asked him to join the Friends of Art Council in 2008, he wasn't sure how it would fit into his hectic schedule.

"But when I would go to the meetings, it was like this quiet time, and I thought, 'This is *amazing*,'" Flores said. "It was therapeutic. And I realized this is what the museum can be for my family and for the entire community. It's the counterbalance to chaos."

The son of a Mexican-born father and Mexican-American mother, Flores is the youngest of 16 children, raised in Alliance, Nebraska, a small railroad town in the state's northwestern panhandle. Although he had a wonderful childhood, filled with music,

"art wasn't part of our life growing up," he said. High-school trips to New York and Europe offered a first experience of life beyond his hometown, while his years at the University of Nebraska, where he also earned a master's degree in Latin American Literature and Culture, opened his eyes to great artists, writers and filmmakers.

Still, after arriving in Kansas City 17 years ago with his wife, Becky, co-founding Puente Marketing in 2003, and engaging in a number of civic causes, Flores tried to politely decline the offer to join the Friends Council, claiming little connection to the museum. "But I was told, 'That's kind of what this whole thing is about.'" Indeed, just as Puente means "bridge" in Spanish, Flores realized his outside perspective could form a bridge from the museum to the rest of the community.

In the past five years, Flores dove in headfirst and now serves as chair of

the 16-member council. He says the Friends' mission is just that, to be a friend and meet those in diverse communities where they are. By piggybacking onto existing events, Flores and his team have brought the museum to neighborhoods east of the Plaza, Parkville, Weston, Kansas City, Kansas, south Johnson County and beyond.

One of the messages: the museum fits what your schedule will allow. "You don't have to take it all in at once," Flores said. "It's free, so come back again and again." Putting this into practice, he arranged a private tour for his daughter Julia's soccer teammates and their families.

As Flores's daughters, now ages 12 to 18, are only more involved with activities and sports, the family is happy to balance raucous games with quiet reprieves at the museum. "You don't cheer the art, but you can truly appreciate it," he said. "It's just unbelievable what we have here."