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# Concerned community forms new coalition

By Catherine Blalock and Doug Kerns  
Staff Reporters

The death of Francisco Renteria on September 30 has affected many members of the community beyond the family he left behind.

Citizens concerned about Renteria's death and the well-being of his family formed the Lincoln Intercultural Coalition.

On June 21, coalition leaders met publicly in the Hispanic Community Center to react to the acquittal of Officer Luke Wilke of the Lincoln Police Department on a third-degree assault charge in connection with Renteria's death.

Another concern voiced at the coalition meeting was the possible division between the minority community and the police.

Spanel said, "If we're going to get some resolution, we've got to meet on some middle ground somewhere. I think we've made as many efforts as we can within reason to let the community know how we operate."

Elliot Rivas, Director of the Center and coalition member, felt that the case's impact would be felt by the entire city.

"It's not just a minority/police issue," he said.

Leola Bullock of Lincoln said at the meeting that the problem was with individual police, not the whole department.

"They (some police officers) can't seem to get it through their heads that any minority person walking down the street is not a criminal," she said.

The members noted that only rarely did officers attend meetings at the Community Center.

Spanel responded, "As an individual police officer, I would feel extremely uncomfortable because I'm not going to put myself in a position to be the subject of verbal assault."

The make-up of the jury for Wilke and Schellpeper was also a concern.

In a letter sent to District Judge Donald Endacott, Bartle and Attorney General Don Stenberg said they were "gravely concerned" that both juries were predominately white.

Excused juror Eric Nemeth of Lincoln was the only minority called for jury duty in the Schellpeper case. He felt that the jury should have been made up of Francisco Renteria's peers.

"In my opinion cops take a different look at minorities. They do a double take when they see a minority," he said.

The coalition hopes to positively impact the community.

"We're trying to make something positive out of this," Riveras said.

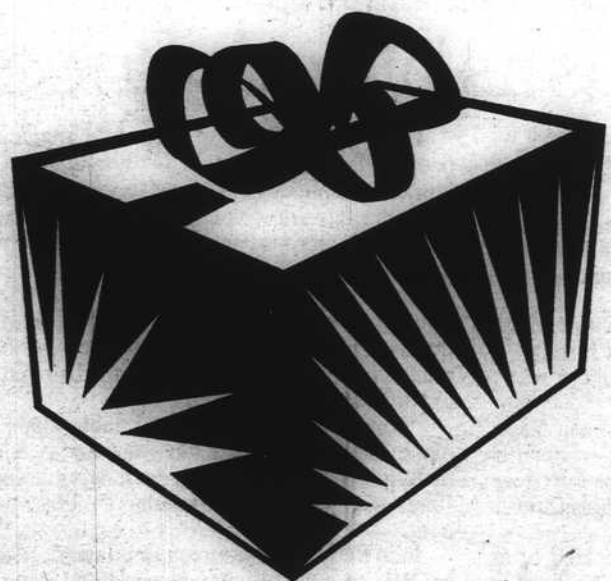
"One of the major concerns is to give support to the Renteria family," he said.

Some goals the coalition plans to achieve are to develop programs such as a liaison with the Lincoln Police Department. The main goal is to educate the police about different languages and cultures so incidents like this do not happen again, Riveras said.

Coalition meetings are held on the first of every month at 7 p.m. at the United Faith Community Church, 33rd and Holdredge streets.

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