

Florida Prepaid College Foundation

Hispanic Heritage Month 2017

Elementary School Winner

Title- Vincente Martinez Ybor - a Man of Influence

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Student's name- Ayan Nallamshetty

Home Town - Tampa, Florida

Grade level- 5th

Hispanic-Americans have played an important role in shaping Florida today. Florida received its first Cuban exiles in 1823. At that time, Cuba was ruled by Spain but Cubans wanted independence from the Spanish monarchy. The Cubans organized revolts against Spain resulting in a revolutionary war in 1868. Many Cubans fled their homeland to come to Florida to escape war. One of these refugees was Vincente Martinez Ybor who would shape Florida's history in many ways.

Mr. Ybor had a busy cigar business in Cuba. After coming to Florida in 1869, he established his cigar factory in Key West. In 1885, he decided to move his business after speaking with his close friend, Mr. Gavino Gutierrez. I had the honor to interview the direct descendant of Mr. Gutierrez, Dr. Kelly Fabrega who is a Tampa physician. I learned from her that Mr. Gutierrez convinced Mr. Ybor to move to Tampa because the Henry Plant railroad was being built to connect Tampa to the rest of the country. This would allow him to start selling cigars throughout the United States.

As the area around the cigar factories grew, it became known as Ybor city. Many immigrants migrated to Ybor city from places like Cuba, Italy, Spain, and Latin America in search for work. By 1910, there were over 150 cigar factories in the Tampa area. Of the 50,000 residents of Tampa, 14,000 were Cuban, 7,500 were Spanish, and 1,500 were Italians.

The impact of the Cuban Americans who developed Ybor city and the cigar industry in Tampa can still be seen today. The descendants of Mr. Ybor continue to manage the Columbia restaurant, which is known to be Florida's oldest restaurant. This restaurant is believed to be the largest Spanish restaurant in the world. Warm Cuban bread and cafe con leche are delicious treats that many enjoy.

One of the city's renovated cigar factories is home to Ybor Square, a shopping mall. The

113- year-old building still has its original red brick walls and cracked wooden beams. There are three restored cigar workers' houses and a beautiful garden. The brick roads and the old lampposts make you feel like you have stepped back in time. When I walk through the streets, it makes me imagine of the days of Mr. Ybor and Mr. Gutierrez. Even the wild chickens in Ybor city are descendants of the original chickens that the cigar factory workers owned hundreds of years ago. Hispanic movies and musical concerts are still held in Ybor city today. It is a popular place for locals and tourists to spend evenings with friends.

Vincente Martinez Ybor is known for his good nature and fatherly behavior towards his workers. In his factory, he hired workers of different backgrounds. He was a leader who was the perfect example of the American dream – he created a wonderful community and culture in Tampa that still lives strong today. Mr. Ybor is just one of many Hispanic Americans who have helped shape the state of Florida.

Works Cited - Vincente Martinez Ybor - a Man of Influence

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