



Staff photo / Greg Andersen

Ray Lozano, who likes to keep busy, takes a break from cleaning and waxing floors at Whittier High School.

Careers a labor of love for Whittier man

Rail, precious metal worker, miner, he's taken many paths

By Bruce Murray
Staff Writer

Let's drink to the hard-working people,
Let's drink to the lowest of birth,
Raise your glass to the good in the people,
Let's drink to the salt of the earth.

Say a prayer for the common foot-soldier,
Spare a nod for his back-breaking work,
Say a prayer for his wife and his children,
Burn the fires while he still tills the earth,

Let's drink to the salt of the earth.
— Keith Richards
The Rolling Stones

Spare a moment for Ray Lozano, former copper miner, railway worker, aluminum and brass caster, tire maker, sulfuric acid plant worker, and now floor waxer for the Whittier School District. Ray Lozano, Salt of the Earth.

"I've kept myself pretty well busy over the years, but that's the way I like it," said the 60-year-old Lozano, who along with his line of tough careers managed to raise five children. He is now the grandfather of

five.

Born in 1930 in the mining town of Santa Rita, N.M., Lozano recalls his life's experience with precision to the minutest detail.

He said his grandfather used to tell stories about Santa Rita's enormous copper mine which was discovered by the Spaniards in the 16th century. The Spaniards had the Indians work in the mine, and the Indians continue to work there today, said Lozano.

Lozano's own Indian ancestors worked in the mine, his grandfather worked in the mine, and his father died in an accident there when Ray was 14 years old.

The oldest of eight children, Lozano found himself the man of the household early in life. He withdrew from the eighth grade and was sent to northern California where he and an uncle worked in the grape fields.

Lozano sent his earnings back to his family in New Mexico. "With my mother working and myself working, we were able to maintain. Later mom and three of the kids got on Social Security. I found out later that we should have all gotten Social Security."

After a year of migratory work in California, Lozano returned home to New Mexico, where he continued farm work.

Dissatisfied with the low to nonexistent pay, Lozano entered the copper mine where

he seemed destined to work. A slight modification on his birth certificate — to say he was 18 years old instead of 17 — cleared his way.

Lozano described the entire operation of the mine from the ends of the tiny, dust-choked shafts to the pig smelters where the copper was refined and cast.

"The Santa Rita mine is basically an enormous pit in the ground with various levels — each about 50-60 feet high. On each level there are numerous shafts which bore into the earth horizontally. Little rail cars in the shafts carry the ore out to the pit where it is then hauled up top with an elevator."

Lozano worked on the rail crew, repairing and extending the tracks as the shafts were extended farther into the earth. "We were miles and miles underground. Even with respirators it was hard to breathe. All of the people hauling the ore in and out, up and down — they were like ants working in an enormous ant hole."

Lozano worked in the mine for 11 years and luckily escaped the same fate as his father. During that time he helped provide for his mother, brothers, and sisters, and then a wife and daughter.

Strikes in the mine sent Lozano and his new family to California, where he found employment with Morris Kirk

Aluminum in Vernon. Lozano's job was to smash car batteries to recover the metal core. "I wore heavy clothes to protect myself from the acid," he said.

Lozano was laid off after two and a half months, but quickly found employment with Price Pfister Brass in Los Angeles. Lozano made the sand molds for casting, and his wife Reine, (now deceased) worked in the grinding department, cleaning the scrap from the finished product.

"That was the hardest job I ever had. Sometimes when I got home my hands would be crumpled up from working in so much heat and carrying so much weight consistently," he remembered.

In 1959, Lozano hooked up with Goodrich (the East Los Angeles plant), where he had a less dangerous job making tires. He worked there until 1975, when the plant closed.

Lozano is now the floor crew lead man for the Whittier School District. "It's the best job I've ever had," he said; "at my age, things need to slow down a bit."

Lozano celebrated his 60th birthday last June with his children and grandchildren. "Even though he had to work hard, he always had time for us," said his 27-year-old daughter Sonya, who is an engineering aide at Northrop.