

CATERING TO LATINOS

San Diego native Ramirez goes from Tejano music to making films about Latino culture



Co-Director Sergio Ramirez (left) and Co-Director Matthew Ramirez (right) give actors Chelsie Prendez and Luis Caldiera instructions in a bedroom scene on the set of "For Amor."



Co-Directors Sergio Ramirez (left) and Matthew Ramirez (right) discuss a scene with actress Chelsie Prendez on the set of "For Amor."

Nicholas Dominguez grew tired of sitting at the dinner table with tortillas as the main staple night after night.

"Tortillas again!" he'd often say. Nicholas, like many young Latinos in Texas, never appreciated his ancestry.

And while Nicholas is only a character in a film to soon be released on DVD, he is an example of the youth today who do not understand the Latino cultural or embrace it, says film producer Paul Ramirez.

Ramirez, a native of San Diego, Texas, is anticipating the release of his film "Tortillas Again" on April 11.

The DVDs will be available at Blockbuster and Hollywood Video and are being distributed by Maverick Entertainment of Florida, an international company.

Ramirez owned and operated a Tejano recording label in San Antonio which led to the production of music videos. From there, he decided to try to film some short films and then a feature-length film.

"Two or three years ago, I saw an article about a director-producer

directing movies catered to African-Americans, Mr. Singleton, like 'Friday' and 'Next Friday' and so on," Ramirez said in a phone interview. "So, I figured since he was making movies catering to African Americans, we needed to be making movies catered to the Latino audience. There's a demand for that. Our distributors are anxiously awaiting us."

"Tortillas Again" is the first feature-length film for Ramirez, 45.

The movie takes place in south San Antonio and features the Dominguez family, a lower-middle class family. The film takes place over a three-day period.

Alejandro Dominguez, the patriarch, has been playing the same Lotto numbers for 10 years, and like he does each Friday, purchases a ticket.

Through the course of the movie,

the ticket gets moved around the family's home, finally landing in his mother-in-law's apron while she was making tortillas. A piece of *masa* falls in her apron pocket and when she pulls it out and continues to roll her



tortillas, she doesn't realize the ticket has ended up in a tortilla.

Meanwhile, Alejandro is showering when he hears the numbers called out on the radio and realizes he won. A search for the ticket begins, and it isn't until Nicholas sits down to eat yet again more tortillas, that the ticket

is discovered - in his mouth.

The family wins a \$32 million jackpot.

Ideas for Ramirez's movies - his next is currently filming - come from life. His son, Matthew, and his friend, Sergio Ramirez, are the writers. Lobo Video Productions, LLC, Ramirez's company, is currently filming a romantic drama, "For Amor" and then has plans to film "Coca," a film about cocaine drug trafficking in Mexico.

Sometime in 2007, Ramirez plans to return to his native San Diego, where he graduated from high school in 1978, to film a movie based loosely on his grandfather, Marciano Campos. The movie, entitled El Patron and the Bootlegger, will be film in and around San Diego in Alice.

He's also planning another film that deals with immigration and a family divided between Mexico and Texas.

"It's important to shoot in Texas. We cast these people as average Latinos," Ramirez said. "There are lots of stories to be told about our heritage and our culture, and it's

important to get it around the world. Our distributors are international so will be available in the U.S. and abroad."

Ramirez said it's important to tackle such issues as drug trafficking and immigration.

"It's art and if it creates some controversy so be it," he said. "We are doing it because the issues are there and they aren't going to go away." Ramirez's films are considered fusion films because they integrate two languages - English and Spanish. The dialogue in the films is about 80 percent English and 20 percent Spanish.

He says he hopes Latinos who see his films can relate to the nuances of the Latino culture.

"In a lot of our movies, like 'Tortillas Again,' viewers can see themselves in the scenes and say 'Wow, that's like me, or like my uncle.'"

Ramirez, who visits South Texas during the holidays to see his mother Guadalupe Hughes, who now lives in Alice, says he plans to continue to make films for Latinos for as long as he can.



Director of Photography Craig Ballin and Co-Director Sergio Ramirez discuss lighting and camera angles on the set of "For Amor."