

Mexican American Chamber taps Auroran as Man of the Year



Mike Saltijeral

By Tom Parisi
STAFF WRITER

CHICAGO – Persian Gulf War veteran Mike Saltijeral won honors on the battlefield. Now he's doing the same in the business world.

The Mexican American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois will name the 29-year-old Saltijeral its Man of the Year during a ceremony tonight at the Palmer House.

Chicago Mayor Richard Daley is expected to be in attendance at the \$200-a-plate event, along with a host of prominent Hispanic businessmen. Chicago School Board President Gery Chico also will be honored with the chamber's Leadership Award.

"I feel great, honored," said Saltijeral, a decorated Marine who saw

combat action in the Persian Gulf.

The lifelong Auroran and father of three is now co-owner of Universal Iron Works in Cicero, a manufacturer of wrought-iron fencing, railings and steel spiral staircases.

Saltijeral became a partner in the Universal Iron Works two years ago, and the company began to make inroads as a commercial supplier of fencing.

Affirmative action provided the company with an in, Saltijeral said.

"As soon as we got our foot in the door, we proved ourselves," he said.

Saltijeral said sales jumped from \$600,000 a year to nearly \$4 million. Customers now include the CTA, Metra, the city of Chicago and Home Depot.

"Anyone who's done that for his

company should be recognized," said Juan Ochoa, executive director of the Mexican American Chamber of Commerce.

Ochoa said Saltijeral is being recognized for his community involvement as well. Saltijeral is a member of the boards of directors for the chamber and the Boys and Girls Club of Chicago. He serves as a mentor in the club's Junior Achievement program.

Ochoa said Saltijeral also has been instrumental in bolstering the chamber's membership. Saltijeral signed up 15 new businesses.

"He's a good reflection of our organization," Ochoa said. "I have an old saying; you don't judge a person by their words but by their actions. This guy comes through."



Congratulations and a stellar **BOW** to native Auroran Mike Saltijeral on his selection as 1997 Man of the Year by the Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois. The 29-year-old Saltijeral, a decorated veteran of the Persian Gulf War, co-owns Universal Iron Works, a decorative fencing and staircase firm in Cicero, where annual sales have jumped from \$600,000 to \$4 million under his direction. That spells success in anybody's book.