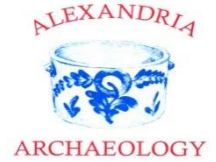




City of Alexandria  
Office of Historic Alexandria  
*Alexandria Legacies*  
**Oral History Program**



**Project Name:** *Chronicling the Pandemic COVID-19 Project*

**Title:** *Interview with Miguel Blancas*

**Date of Interview:** *July 14, 2021*

**Location of Interview:** *Online via Zoom*

**Interviewer:** *Terilee Edwards-Hewitt*

**Transcriber:** *Heather Hanna*

**Abstract:** *Miguel Blancas came to Northern Virginia after meeting his wife in a study abroad program in Spain. Mr. Blancas started working for the City of Alexandria in the Court Service Unit. In February 2020 during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Blancas began working for the Emergency Operations Center [EOC] where he developed a tracker for recording the continuance of operations plans for the City. He has continued to work for the EOC as a documentation leader within the planning section of EOC. Mr. Blancas keeps in touch with distant family members with digital video communications and relaxes by biking on the W&OD Railroad Trail. He is currently working on his Master's Degree in Public Administration.*

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<b><i>Introduction</i></b>	
Teri Edwards-Hewitt:	So, this is Teri Edwards-Hewitt, and I am talking today to Miguel Blancas. And today is July 14, 2021, and we're going to be talking about his work for the City of Alexandria, and specifically related to the COVID-19 pandemic, but then also a little bit about his work in general for the City, because I think it's really cool. So, thank you very much.
Miguel Blancas:	Sure.
<b><i>Background in Mexico</i></b>	
TEH:	I'd like to ask some background information, because it's always cool to get people's background, that's the historian in me. So where are you originally from?
Miguel Blancas:	I was born and raised in Mexico. Very close to Mexico City, two hours east from Mexico City. It's another state; it's called Tlaxcala, and I was born and raised there, and I lived in a few different states within Mexico, and seven years ago I came to the US. So, yeah, from Mexico.
<b><i>Coming to Northern Virginia</i></b>	
TEH:	From Mexico, very cool. Um, and when you came to the US, did you, was the D.C. area the first place you were, or were you elsewhere?
Miguel Blancas:	Yeah, I married my wife, ah, we met in Spain. She's from Fairfax, she's a Fairfax native. And after Spain she came back to Fairfax, I went back to Mexico. And I came to visit a couple of times, she went to visit me a couple of times. And in some point we were thinking, what's the next step here. And we decided that I was gonna come here and here I am.
TEH:	Awesome!
Miguel Blancas:	I went straight to Fairfax, we, I lived in Fairfax until two weeks ago when we moved to Manassas. Still, same, Northern Virginia.
<b><i>College &amp; Education in Criminology</i></b>	
TEH:	Right, right. And you had met your wife in Spain?
Miguel Blancas:	Yeah.
Teri	And you were, was it for school?
Miguel Blancas:	Yeah, we were both studying abroad. She was, ah, I'm not very familiar with how school works here, but there's a junior, senior, something like that, years, and she was in her junior year, and she had some study abroad program or something like that, and I was doing a specialty in criminal policy in the same university as her in

	Spain, yeah.
TEH:	Oh, very cool. So, and I see that your degree is, you've got a bachelor's in criminology.
Miguel Blancas:	Yeah.
TEH:	Wow.
Miguel Blancas:	Yeah. It's fascinating, I love criminology. I don't know if you know what criminology is?
TEH:	Only a teeny bit, only because my uncle was a social worker and he worked with his state's justice system.
Miguel Blancas:	So, criminology is not collecting fingerprints or blood, or bullet; none of that. It's, it's a sociological science, and it's basically understanding why crime happens and developing strategies to reduce crime. So, you see crime as a social phenomenon rather than a singular event. And it's fascinating; I really love that. Ah, but we might talk about it later; my career switched during the pandemic, ah, 180 degrees. It's not even close to criminology anymore. But we'll get to that I guess.
TEH:	Okay. Well, and you're currently working toward your master's.
Miguel Blancas:	I am.
TEH:	And what is that in?
Miguel Blancas:	It's a master in public administration, through the University of Birmingham [in the United Kingdom].
TEH:	Okay. I'm assuming distance learning.
Miguel Blancas:	Distance learning, yes, yes. I'm not gonna be able to fly every week, but yeah.
TEH:	Okay. Ah, very cool. And when you were in college as an undergraduate, did you have a favorite college class?
Miguel Blancas:	Um, so the way it works in Mexico is, you have five years of college, right, and it's not that you have two years of general knowledge and then you switch into your major, It's five years of, in my case it was five years of criminology. So you start with basic criminology, and, just an example, you start with criminal psychology 1, and throughout the five years you end up with criminal psychology 4, right, which is an advanced level. So, I will say that my favorite topic or my favorite class was criminal policy. And crime prevention. That, that was mine. I mean I love criminology, I love all the, all the classes, but those two were my favorites I think because I like policy, and I like the administration behind the policy, so yeah.

TEH:	Right. Very cool. I just was gonna mention, so my uncle worked on a program to reduce juvenile, teenagers, like the idea being their first time in the court system would be the only time. So what interventions, what can happen so, you know, they're not, don't get into that system. But that, I mean that's my only knowledge of it though.
Miguel Blancas:	Yeah. Yeah.
<b><i>Working for the City of Alexandria</i></b>	
TEH:	Um. So now, you've worked for the City, for several jobs.
Miguel Blancas:	I do. I do.
TEH:	And I don't know if you're doing all of them concurrently, or one led to another to another, to what you've been doing since COVID[-19], so I don't know if you want to talk about the first job, or first jobs you were doing?
Miguel Blancas:	Yeah, sure, so my home department is the Court Service Unit. I was hired at the Court Service Unit as a crime and violence prevention, I guess for the city, and I was developing a program for the high school, T.C. Williams High School [now Alexandria City High School]. I think they already changed the name.
TEH:	Yup, just. Yup. I know what you mean.
Miguel Blancas:	<p>At the time. I mean, it's been a few months, but at the time it was called T.C. Williams High School. And I was working with the international academy, and I had, I had this passion for improving processes, right? My main focus was improving programs that would lead to crime prevention, gun prevention, acculturation for youth that are coming from other countries and stuff like that, but always with a focus on how do we make a program efficient and how do we make sure that the program is actually giving the result that it's supposed to be giving. So my, my supervisor and my director kind of know, or they knew that I have this focus on data, numbers, and how do we translate that into policy or into programs. And throughout, I was gonna say throughout last year, but no, throughout the year before the pandemic hit, I was doing all this work with T.C. Williams and the two middle schools that we have in the city, and I think in February, or beginning of—no, it was February, ah, the director of the Department of Project Implementation was assigned to the Emergency Operations Center to help respond to the pandemic as a planning chief.</p> <p>And my guess, and it's just a guess because I'm not sure how that happened, but the director of the Court Service Unit was in a meeting with the director of the Department of Project Implementation, Terry [Terry A. Suehr], and I guess Terry brought up the topic to</p>

	my director, saying well I need to do this assignment that the city manager requested and I don't know if you have somebody that will be able to help. At that point we were not in the response to the pandemic yet; it was planning in case something—.
TEH:	Okay. And that was February of 2020?
<b><i>Working for the EOC [Emergency Operations Center] due to the COVID-19 Pandemic</i></b>	
Miguel Blancas:	That was around February. And so my, the director of the Court Service Unit said well, I have this guy, Miguel, and he might be able to help with a few spreadsheets. Um, so Terry called me, we had a quick meeting and she said well, this is what I need. Basically, how do we make sure that all the departments are prepared if we need to, ah, have a stay at home order; how do we keep functioning? And she had a pretty clear instruction, so this is, I need to make sure that we have continuance of operations plans for every single department, and how to make sure that all the departments know how to keep the services going if we have to stay at home. So, we developed a tracker, ah, a tracker for tracking the continuance of operations plans. And I guess she liked what I developed there, and when the actual instruction of extending the Emergency Operations Center came, she asked if I could join as part of the formal emergency operations structure as the documentation leader within the planning section of the Emergency Operations Center.
TEH:	Wow!
Miguel Blancas:	So we talked to my supervisor, my director, and, um, basically, Terry said well, I need Miguel to continue supporting me with what he did before, but now in a more formal way, and at the time I guess nobody knew how to respond; we never went through a pandemic, so we didn't know how much time that was going to require, we didn't know how much, ah, research or learning curve or any of that. Um, so I said yes, and my director said yes you go ahead and support Terry, and in the meantime you will be working 50/50; 50 percent of your time EOC, 50 percent of your time CSU, and quickly we realized that that was gonna be impossible.
TEH:	So EOC is Emergency Operations—?
Miguel Blancas:	Center.
TEH:	Okay. And then what is the other one?
Miguel Blancas:	CSU. Court Service Unit.
TEH:	Court, okay, cool. Just 'cause, you know, we all have all these, in the City, all these acronyms.
Miguel Blancas:	Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Acronyms. Except, we realized that 50/50 wasn't gonna work. So we had a meeting, the three of us; Terry, Mike

	<p>[Mike Mackey], and myself, um, and we decided that I was gonna focus on the response to Covid, whatever needed, whatever was needed from the EOC, and the remaining of my time was gonna be used for Court Service Unit. And the, I guess the interesting stuff started happening, right? We had to plan for, ah, the moving people to their houses and being able to work from home. We needed to plan a couple of appendixes for the continuance of operations plan. One of them was them, oof! I can't remember the name. But it was basically planning for a worst-case scenario, right? If my, my workforce gets reduced to a certain point, what do I need to continue providing services?</p> <p>So that was the whole planning behind it, and we were working, I will say, close to sixty hours per week for the first seven months. And it was nonstop, it was nonstop, nonstop. And it was very cool because you have to coordinate with thirty-two or thirty-three departments and offices. And we all have to be on the same page. And yeah, it was absolutely fantastic. We developed trainings for people to come to the office, how to be safe, how to—now it's history, but how to keep your six feet distant, how to wash your hands, how to cover your cough. And it basically was you have to pull a training for the work force in less than two weeks with the resources that we have. Right, there is no, I have to call a consultant that is gonna give me a deadline. No, it has to be done in two weeks. We have to do whatever we need to do to get it done and get it ready and out. Ah, and just like that, we had many other needs that had to be covered and we were working on that, and at the time we didn't have the vaccines yet, we didn't have any of that.</p> <p>So, it was how do we procure enough masks? How do we procure enough gloves? How do we make sure that the burning rate of the personal protective equipment is not higher than what we have in storage? And we were involved in all that. We had to make sure that we had a good burning rate tracking, we had a good inventory management system. So all that happened in months; in seven, eight, nine months.</p>
TEH:	Wow!
Miguel Blancas:	I went on parental leave, after seven months of being in the EOC.
TEH:	Congratulations!
Miguel Blancas:	Six months, six months, yeah. Six months, and I came back after three weeks and Terri wasn't longer the chief of planning; she was, I guess she went back to continue her job as director of the Department of Project Implementation, and Ray Whatley came as the chief of planning, and at the time, when I was supposed to come back, I didn't know that Terry wasn't longer here, but maybe one or two days before I was supposed to come back, I emailed her saying

	<p>I'm about to go back to work, I think if I'm not miscalculating, with parental leave, you have two months. One is with your regular parental leave, and you can use definitely for the rest of the time, but I don't know. I knew there was a need, I knew there was this COVID thing that wasn't stopping and I had to go back to the office. So I contacted Terry and I said I'm going back and I will take the rest of my time staggered or however is needed, but I want to be part of the response. And she said that's great, but I'm not longer the chief of planning, but I will suggest that you talk to Ray Whately and ask if he wants you to go, come back to the planning, or you go back to your home department. And I talked to Ray, and I guess Ray talked to Terry, and Ray said you're, you're not going anywhere. So, I went back to the EOC and started working again, mostly EOC, part Court Service Unit, and that's when we started developing the vaccination.</p>
<p>TEH:</p>	<p>[Vaccine] Pods? [Temporary Vaccination Centers] Or—?</p>
<p>Miguel Blancas:</p>	<p>Yes. But we, on our end, in the planning, we were developing a system to recruit city workers to staff the pods. So I don't know if you ever received an email saying—.</p>
<p>TEH:</p>	<p>I did.</p>
<p>Miguel Blancas:</p>	<p>—staff, we need staff; that was me.</p>
<p>TEH:</p>	<p>Excellent!</p>
<p>Miguel Blancas:</p>	<p>And every, every week we had a schedule and we had to meet the, I guess the minimum staff needed to be able to vax, get people vaccinated. And, uh, at the beginning of that, it was also fifty, fifty-five hour weeks of work, and it was a continue—it wasn't like one day we had to work all that and the next day it wasn't. It was, it was every single day for around two, three months? And I, we started vaccinating people in December, around the 20, I don't know if it's 23, 24, 20 something.</p>
<p>TEH:</p>	<p>So right before Christmas [2020].</p>
<p>Miguel Blancas:</p>	<p>Right before Christmas, and since then, since then up to June we had to have people supporting the pods and we were behind scenes trying to recruit as many people as we could to make the pods happen. And in some point, I was contacted by the director of the health department, our local health department, and he asked me to develop a system to track vaccines. He said we, we have a system but we need to make sure that we're tracking how many vaccines are going to what arms and which ones are going to partners that are also providing vaccination to people.</p> <p>So we developed the system for them. And during that time around November [2020], I think it was November, Terry, who used to be</p>



	<p>the deputy of, or the chief of planning contacted me saying hey, Miguel, I have this project, it's a citywide project, it's about developing standardized procedures to manage capital infrastructure planning, plan projects. Would you be interested? I said well I am interested because it's all about managing and proving, finding better ways to do things, but I am fully deployed to the EOC and the rest of my time, which I don't have, goes to the Court Service Unit. And she said, well, let me talk to Ray and Mike and see what we can come up with. She posted the role, I applied for it and I got it. So we had to meet, the four of us, and they said, well, how are we going to do this? Ray gave me the authority to have people, to manage some people at the EOC, and they said well you're going to work forty percent EOC, forty percent DPI, Department of Project Implementation, and twenty percent Court Service Unit.</p>
<p>TEH:</p>	<p>Oh, wow.</p>
<p>Miguel Blancas:</p>	<p>Um, I, those are numbers, and I think anybody knows that once, once you start talking about workload, numbers won't match. It's not like, oh no that task goes to forty-one percent of my time, I can do, no. So basically, when I started I was still doing eighty percent, or even one hundred percent EOC. And I have to go above my hours to be compliant with DPI and CSU, and I guess we got to the point where things with the EOC vaccination effort, and people coming back to the office, PPE [Personal Protective Equipment] and, ah, I don't know if you know this, but there's signs around the city that say stay six feet apart, well, there is a process to request those signs. So, we are also behind that process. And once all that was in place the workload kind of reduced; I didn't have to be developing or creating or anything like that, it was just managing what was already in place, but at the same time that that was happening, the workload with DPI was increasing. Because we went from just the standardizations to the CIP process, the Capital Infrastructure Plan, planning, and people in departments have to submit projects for that, and now we are behind the, how they start submitting their proposals.</p>
<p>TEH:</p>	<p>And these are longer term plans, right?</p>
<p>Miguel Blancas:</p>	<p>Yes. So now, at this point I'm pretty much eighty percent DPI, the rest of it is EOC, and whatever remains goes to the CSU, but I never stopped overseeing the [unclear] program with the CSU that we pay for as the city. It's a gang prevention program and when I was fully, fully in my department we developed a system to track compliance. So, we pay them, but they have to report to us, and through this system we make sure that what they're doing is actually having an impact on their families, so I never stopped overseeing that project.</p>

TEH:	Right. That's so important.
Miguel Blancas:	So right now, that is what I do. It depends on, it depends on how they, it looks like I have to go from the EOC to DPI to CSU, and this morning before I came here, I had a meeting with ITS, technology and 'cause we were having some issues with the CIP process, so that is DPI. And then I leave there and I had to go to the EOC and be in a meeting with the EOC general, general staff and unified command, and we're developing a survey to track possible gaps in the EOC structure, when people start going back to their home departments. And, yeah, now I am here. So, it depends on the day. That's, I report to three different directors.
<b><i>Working from Home</i></b>	
TEH:	Wow. But that's, that's awesome, though, I mean, and I mean I'm just really impressed on how the City was able to pivot for so many of us working at home. Now, it sounds like you didn't get to work from home, or did you?
Miguel Blancas:	I haven't worked in my office in a year and a half.
TEH:	Oh, so, okay, so you've been working from home?
Miguel Blancas:	Every single thing I did, and I've done, it has been done remotely. Yeah, but I think something that it's clear is, and this is very impressive to me, is to see how the three directors are able to work together. And something that Mike Mackey, the Court Service Unit director always said is: "If he works for you, he works for me."
TEH:	Yeah. Yeah, so what was it like, and then, you know, at that time we had the stay at home as much as possible, so was your wife able to work from home too?
Miguel Blancas:	She was able to work from home, and it's a funny thing, because we were both working from home, we were living in a condo. Two rooms and we decided this is not working. We decided to sell the condo, and we couldn't find a house to buy. So, we ended up living back to, with my in-laws for nine months while the house in Manassas was being built, because we couldn't buy anything. But yeah, she was working from home all the time. And now, now they're talking about going back to the office, but they were also very flexible.
<b><i>Changes in Neighborhood Due to COVID</i></b>	
TEH:	Right, yeah. What changes did you notice, this is just kind of in general about COVID, the COVID-19 pandemic, you know? What changes did you notice in your neighborhood or your community because of it?
Miguel Blancas:	Um, I think we can even break that down into phases, like at the

	<p>beginning of the pandemic, ah, people were staying away from each other, right? So there is not the normal, nice conversation in the parking lot, or having people over for dinner on the weekends, or none of that. And if you think about it now, that was the case for seven, eight, nine months. And, after that when vaccinate, vaccines were available, then the neighborhood also changed because the people you used to like, or the people you used to talk to, now you realize that they don't necessarily have the same understanding, or the same set of values, and they choose not to get vaccinated, right.</p> <p>So before it was this separation because of the actual virus, and then after that, I see that there is this separation because of the values of each person. Ah, so we have a case of this couple that we liked a lot in the neighborhood, and they're elderly people, very nice people, absolutely amazing people, but she's choosing not to get vaccinated, for whatever belief she has. But that is preventing us from getting close to them. I don't know, I think the way the neighborhood, not only the neighborhood, but I think the whole community changed, it's been, one, different, if you divide the pandemic in stages, and it's been also very difficult in a personal way, because the only thing that the pandemic has done, or mostly, is get people distant, right? In one way. In the other way it's got people together in terms of more media calls, and more using social media and all these digital channels to communicate with people, but I think in a more personal level, at the one-on-one level, we've been getting distant and distant and distant and distant. But now, again, if you break the pandemic in stages, now we are hopefully at the end of it and now you can see that those that are getting vaccinated are getting together and it's just this mixed-up feelings of happiness and sadness because you lost people or because you spent so much time alone, or I don't know. I believe I heard an interview on NPR [National Public Radio] about mental health in COVID, and I think that is also another, another thing that impacted everybody.</p>
<p><b><i>Keeping in Touch with Relatives During COVID</i></b></p>	
<p>TEH:</p>	<p>Yeah. How did you keep, so when, especially when we had the stay at home as much as possible, how did you keep in touch with family and friends? Because you have some family who's in Mexico.</p>
<p>Miguel Blancas:</p>	<p>So, none of my family's here. I have no family, at least in this area, I have uncles in California, but I mean it's the same, it's the same distance between here and where my parents are than here to my uncles. Um, yeah, I mean it's just social media. Well, actually I don't have social media, but Skype and WhatsApp and all these communication channels that now we have.</p>

<b><i>Loving the Work</i></b>	
TEH:	Right. Um, were there any activities you got—well, you were working crazy long hours. What did you do to, for enjoyment, or to, to relax while, you know, because you're doing these long days? Or maybe it was just like: Eat. Sleep.
Miguel Blancas:	For enjoyment, I really, really enjoy the challenge of the work. I really did, and when I had a chance to talk to my friends and other people around, and they talk, they say how hard it was to work with COVID, in my case, if it wasn't because of COVID, I wouldn't be where I am. So, yeah, it was a lot of work, but the challenge was so exciting, and my brain was so stimulated, that it didn't feel like a task; it felt more like, if I get this done, people will benefit from it. People will be safer. People will be better than where we are right now. So, I don't know; it's hard to explain with words because it's very emotional. But it, the work that I was doing was so—yeah, so, challenging and rewarding that it was just a fun thing to do. And in some point, I told my wife, I feel like if you can picture this, this gamer, he goes and wake up in the morning, and then turn on the computer, turn on the PS4 [game system] or whatever they turn on, and they just play with, for hours a day, right? That's how I was feeling. I wake up in the morning, turn on the computer and start playing. But the, the game was surreal that—.
TEH:	Right, figuring the problem out.
<b><i>Bicycling</i></b>	
Miguel Blancas:	Right. And if you messed up the game, you would actually messed up something real. So, you had to be a hundred percent focused on what you were doing. And I don't know, it was fascinating. I was also biking, I'm a biker, and when Terry was my boss, I kind of, we had this unspoken agreement that I was gonna be able to just go for a two hour, three hour ride in the middle of the day, when I knew my meetings were low, or the tasks to deliver were low, and work as long as I needed to, to get the work done, but I was able to just go. And at the end of, before my daughter was born, I was doing sixty miles, yeah, on my bike. And, in that, that lapse of time. So, it was great.
TEH:	Well, that's very cool.
Miguel Blancas:	Yeah, it was fantastic.
TEH:	And were you using any specific trail?
Miguel Blancas:	Yeah, so, I don't know how familiar you are with the trails in Fairfax, but if you take the Fairfax County Parkway you can connect to the W&OD [Washington and Old Dominion Railroad Trail], which

	takes you to Leesburg, or brings you back to the City, so I was doing both, both directions. Um, yeah.
TEH:	So were there other people out on the bike trails?
Miguel Blancas:	They were, there, there were a lot of—.
TEH:	Um, were they biking, walking, both?
Miguel Blancas:	Both, and running. At the beginning, though, the trails were empty.
TEH:	Interesting.
Miguel Blancas:	Yeah. And right before, I guess, November, it's also the cold time, but January, February, you started seeing people back on the trails. Ah, very cautious, because you have these people that tend to speed up when they are biking or running; that is not a fun thing to, to be behind them, especially with COVID. But yeah, you could see more people out on the trails.
<b><i>TV and Radio Habits During COVID</i></b>	
TEH:	Interesting. I was wondering do you listen to radio or TV, or listen to radio or watch TV, and did your viewing patterns change?
Miguel Blancas:	I, we don't watch TV; we don't have TV in the house. We do have a TV, but we don't have a TV provider. I do listen to radio and that was actually how I learned English. Because when I came to the US, I didn't speak English at all.
TEH:	Oh, wow! Oh, my gosh.
<b><i>Learning English</i></b>	
Miguel Blancas:	So, ah, I got here, and I needed to learn it. Like, there, there was no way around it, I had to learn how to speak, how to communicate properly, and I found NPR, and basically, NPR was my English teacher. And, ah, I made myself, I made a commitment with myself to not listen to anything in Spanish. No TV, no radio, no movies, no anything. And this is gonna sound bad, and it hopefully is not inappropriate for your interview, but I decided not to have friends that spoke Spanish; I decided to avoid people that spoke Spanish. Um, it was just my personal way to say—.
TEH:	Just to make yourself speak English.
Miguel Blancas:	I have no option but to learn. And, um, even when my wife used to put music in Spanish, or any TV show in Spanish when we were at her parent's house, I was upset; I used to tell her no, no, please don't do that, don't, don't talk to me in Spanish because she does speak Spanish. Don't put anything in Spanish, please don't. And since then, I guess I develop a habit, and now I just listen to NPR.

<b><i>How Has the Pandemic Changed You?</i></b>	
TEH:	Yeah, it [NPR] is a definite lifeline. I have certain shows that if I miss them, I download the podcast. So has the situation with COVID-19 changed how you think about yourself?
Miguel Blancas:	Oh, one hundred percent! Absolutely. Something that I tell Terry and Mike; one is, because of COVID, COVID taught me how capable I am to deal with complex things. Not only projects and programs, but actual feelings. How, it showed me that I am capable of dealing with, dealing and leading complex situations. And, in a more tangible example, that's how, that's why Terry said why I want you to work here, but that was, that wasn't me trying to show off that I could work, I could do it, it was just what COVID required; it was just what we all needed to do, right? So, it does, it does, I mean it, it changed the perception that I had of myself. I think it made me more confident on my leadership skills. It also made me more confident on my English skills. Yeah, it, I know it's, um, what is the right term? It's like a despair when you say this, but COVID was in some fashion positive to my life. Because—.
TEH:	Right, it had positive effects.
Miguel Blancas:	Absolutely. Because I've been, I've been in the US for seven years, and I wouldn't ever thought that as a Hispanic coming from another country with no English I would have been dealing with COVID from a local government perspective, right? So, I don't know. It's, it's humbling, and it's also a reminder to myself, you can do it. You just need to focus, and get it done.
TEH:	Right. Right. Well. I'm always so impressed, as somebody who grew up in the US, with people who come here and have to learn a language. I mean, I know my grandfather did, I mean many, many years ago, right? But just, I have a lot of respect for that, just 'cause I'm, I don't know if I can do it, you know.
Miguel Blancas:	I think you can, I think anybody can, once, once, once you have no option, you just have to. You will either do it in a longer period of time, or a shorter period of time, but you will definitely do it. Yeah.
TEH:	So is there anything else I haven't asked specifically about the COVID-19, or about your work? You know, your really important work, amazing work with the city, or anything else you want to include?
<b><i>Lesson in Leadership and Humility</i></b>	
Miguel Blancas:	I think there is, there's a lesson that I learned when I was in a [vaccination clinic] pod. I was actually, we were staffing the pods, we were short on staff, I was actually part of the staff in the pod. And I

think it was the first, second, and third pods that we had in December [2020]. We didn't have enough people to staff the pod. Or I'm not sure if we didn't have enough or we just wanted to go in and help, but the day I went to staff the pod, ah, there was Dr. Haering [Dr. Stephen Haering], who at the time was the head of the health department in Alexandria, he got vaccinated that day, and the chief of fire and EMS [Emergency Medical Services] in Alexandria, Chief Hricik [Brian Hricik], and Chief Smedley [Corey A. Smedley], they both, they, the three of them got vaccinated, right? Now, think about this: I come from a country that has a lot of corruption, that if you're rich, you can get better services than others. If you have power, you can get things that others can't, and other stuff that we can spend hours talking and talking about that, but my point was, I was staffing the pods, and I saw Dr. Haering getting in line to get vaccinated. He didn't cross the line. He didn't say, he could have said, I'm gonna get vaccinated before the pod opens. He could have done many things within the law to get his vaccine before anybody else, and he didn't. He doesn't know, but he taught me a lesson of humbleness and leadership. He got in line, and he walked the line until it was his turn to get vaccinated. The same thing happened with Chief Hricik and Chief Smedley. They could have gotten their vaccine; if they had called and said I want that vaccine in my house, they could've got the vaccine; they are the chiefs of, basically the medical response, and they got in line, and they waited their turn until they got to get the vaccine. And Chief Hricik, actually pause after that, he was vaccinating people. He was a vaccinator, in the pod. And to me, this, yes, they're chiefs, yes, they're the leaders, yes, they get the big salary, yes, they have all the responsibility, but yes, they are at our level. They have the humbleness to come to the pod, get in line, and then wait until their turn to get a vaccine. And Chief Hricik had, I don't know, it's not humbleness, it just, had the human spirit to go and sit down and put vaccines in people's arms, when he could have had another paramedic go and do it.

So, I don't know, it just, I think that was an eye-opening, that was just a lesson for myself, and the other one was, yes, I was behind, recruiting people for the pods and creating the system to develop the pods and all that stuff, but when I was at the pod, just seeing all these people from the City coming to help, because they weren't there just because they were gonna get paid; they were there to help get people vaccinated.

And that was an enormous lesson, enormous lesson for me, and that is just me assessing what's around myself, but you had people from [unclear] of Alexandria, you had people from finance, you had people from the health department, you had people from everywhere coming to a place and helping the community. And yes,

	we are public servants, and yes, that is in our job description, right, because we, there is a place that says “and other tasks needed”. Well, that wasn't a task needed, that was an offer, a call for help, and everybody came and helped. So, I don't know, it just—.
TEH:	Yeah, no, it, it really was amazing, and you know, as a part-time City employee, even just the support I got to set up things so I could work from home. And so yeah. And it was great; I mean, I mean, terrible situation, but it was just great to see so many people from the City working for the City.
<i>Coming Together for a Common Cause</i>	
Miguel Blancas:	I think some, something that especially younger generations, and I don't think I'm saying it right, because I'm not saying that I'm young, but younger generations, something that we don't understand is when there's a problem, when there's a pandemic, when there's a social issue, you hear it in the news, you hear it on the radio, you read articles, right? And they say when there's a problem we come together. Well, maybe nobody else saw it, but I did. When things got hot, we all got together. We all worked together. We all put the hours, we all had very little sleep, we all were in this level of, not stress, but like, I don't know, just moving, moving, moving, moving, but we were all on the same page, and that is something that later it will come in the newspapers saying when the COVID-19 happened we all came together. I saw it coming together. I saw the people coming together.
TEH:	That's so cool!
Miguel Blancas:	And that's just cool, yeah.
TEH:	That's awesome. Well, thank you, that seems like a good stopping point.
Miguel Blancas:	Alright.
TEH:	Alright well, let me shut off the various [recording] devices.
Miguel Blancas:	Sure. I don't know if that's what you wanted?
TEH:	Absolutely!