

Author brings inspiration story of success to students

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Students at Westmont High School recently got a real-life lesson from an author who overcame hardship and poverty to become a successful businessman running his own corporation.

Author Robert Renteria, who wrote "From the Barrio to the Boardroom," visited the school March 2 to talk with students and staff members to relate the message of his book — that hard work will make you successful.

"The moral of the book is that education and hard work are so important in the lives of students today," he said. "While I wrote the book, it really isn't my story — it's theirs."

The book tells the life story of Renteria, who grew up in East Los Angeles, where he became involved with gangs, drugs and dropped out of high school.

After the death of his estranged father, Renteria made changes in his life. He joined the Army, moved to Chicago after he was discharged after seven years and got a job at a laundry management and sales company that eventually led him to a position as the



vice president of a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange.

He is now chairman of the From the Barrio Foundation, a nonprofit corporation based in suburban Mundelein that uses Renteria's experience to spread the message to schools across the county and raise money for education.

"I went from being homeless, to now being the CEO of my own corporation," he said. "That is the message that I am try-

ing to get across to students. That gangs and drugs are not a lifestyle, they are a death-style."

Westmont High School Assistant Principal Nancy Bartosz said the book, which is used as part of the freshmen curriculum, is about building leaders, which is the goal of Westmont High School.

"Much of what Robert talks about in the book is about building leaders, not just for today, but as the students go to college and

Westmont freshmen (left) Amanda Mazingo and Andrea Lara of Westmont ask author of "From the Barrio to the Boardroom" Robert Renteria questions regarding his life, including if he had expected to be where his is now as well as if he wanted to be a writer during his visit to the school March 2.

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beyond," Bartosz said.

Students who heard Renteria's presentation and met with him afterwards said they got a lot out of the messages he was teaching.

"I found him to be a very inspiring," said junior Bob Kuzlik. "He showed that had work can really pay off."

Sophomore Jackie Zakhem said after meeting Renteria, and hearing his message, that she will take the time to read the book.

"He said no matter how tough things get, there is a way to still be a success," she said. "And he seems like a real nice guy."

During Renteria's visit to the school, he spoke to students about the book in an auditorium for students of all high school grade levels, then held a separate Q&A session with freshmen who had read the book in class, and were interested in writing.

Renteria then met with more students, teachers and community members during a meet-and-greet after school. Bartosz said teachers were asked to provide a list of students who are leaders and captains of various WHS clubs and athletic groups for personal invites to the after school event.