

Speaker: Go outside comfort zone

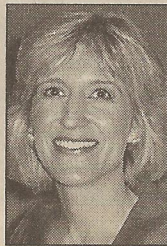
Hundreds turn out for Diversity Conference at Roosevelt School

By **MARY NEVANS-PEDERSON**
TH staff writer

Lisa Koss asked the 500 people in front of her Wednesday to “get uncomfortable.” She wasn’t talking about their physical positions — she was referring to their daily lives.

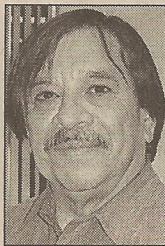
Sit by someone you don’t know. Go to a new event. Invite someone outside of your normal circle to your house for coffee.

Make these regular parts of your week and you will make new contacts in your life, said Koss, addressing the 2007 Diversity Conference sponsored by Faces & Voices cultural celebrations and held at Eleanor



Lisa Koss

Roosevelt Middle School.



A. Villareal

“Making contact is the exchanging, not the merging, of energy,” said Koss, the founder of International Advantage LLC-Leading Across Cultures, based in Phoenix. Interpersonal contacts and connections are critical to overcoming the “isms” — racism, sexism, ageism — and other biases that inhibit inclusion, she said.

People with power and privilege can seldom see the “quiet issues” that daily plague those living on the margins of the

community, Koss said, adding that the powerful and privileged also don’t need the support of a group.

“If you have power and privilege, you can stand on your own, you have the resources to support you,” she said, whereas in less-privileged cultures, group support is paramount.

Several hundred people attended breakout sessions on topics such as subtle discrimination, mental illness in the workplace and sexual-orientation issues.

As the administrator of the Iowa Division of Latino Affairs, Armando Villareal spoke on “Immigration — State of the Future.”

The Latino population in Iowa has risen dramatically, from 84,000 in 2000 to 115,000 in 2005, and that number will nearly triple by 2030, Villareal said. The number of Latino

students in the state’s schools has increased sevenfold in 20 years, he added.

Like in the rest of the nation, Iowa’s Latinos are a mix of legal and illegal immigrants and longtime residents. But Villareal seldom uses the word “illegal,” saying it stifles honest discussion.

“It is modifying the person, not the action,” he said.

American and Mexican companies are both addicted to cheap labor, especially since the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect in 1994, Villareal said. Since then, the demand for cheap products and services has required an ill-paid, often shadowy work force.

“We are all accomplices to some degree,” he said.



■ Video clip