

City library focuses on Hispanic life, heritage

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — A wise man's spirit haunts the field office of the Diocesan Spanish Apostolate, 873 N. Clinton Ave.

Just beyond the door that leads into the apostolate's front room stands a small library named for Guarionex, 16th-century counselor to the Tainos Indians who once inhabited what is now known as Puerto Rico.

When the Spaniards arrived on the island previously visited by Christopher Columbus' second voyage to this hemisphere, they enslaved the Tainos and told them it was impossible to kill a Spaniard. Like the Christian God he worshiped, a slain Spaniard would rise from the dead after three days, the slave masters told the Tainos.

But Guarionex advised the natives to take the Spaniards at their word — and when a party of Spaniards failed to rise three days after being slain during a Taino ambush, the natives rose in rebellion against the Europeans.

Although the rebellion he inspired eventually failed, Guarionex has been revered in Puerto Rico ever since as a patriotic symbol of wisdom, according to Father Laurence Tracy, pastoral assistant to the Spanish Apostolate.

Known in Spanish as Biblioteca Guarionex, the library honoring him offers "probably the best source of information for data on the local Hispanic community," Father Tracy said. He said 80 to 90 percent of the library's 1,500 titles are printed in Spanish, with the remainder in English and Italian.

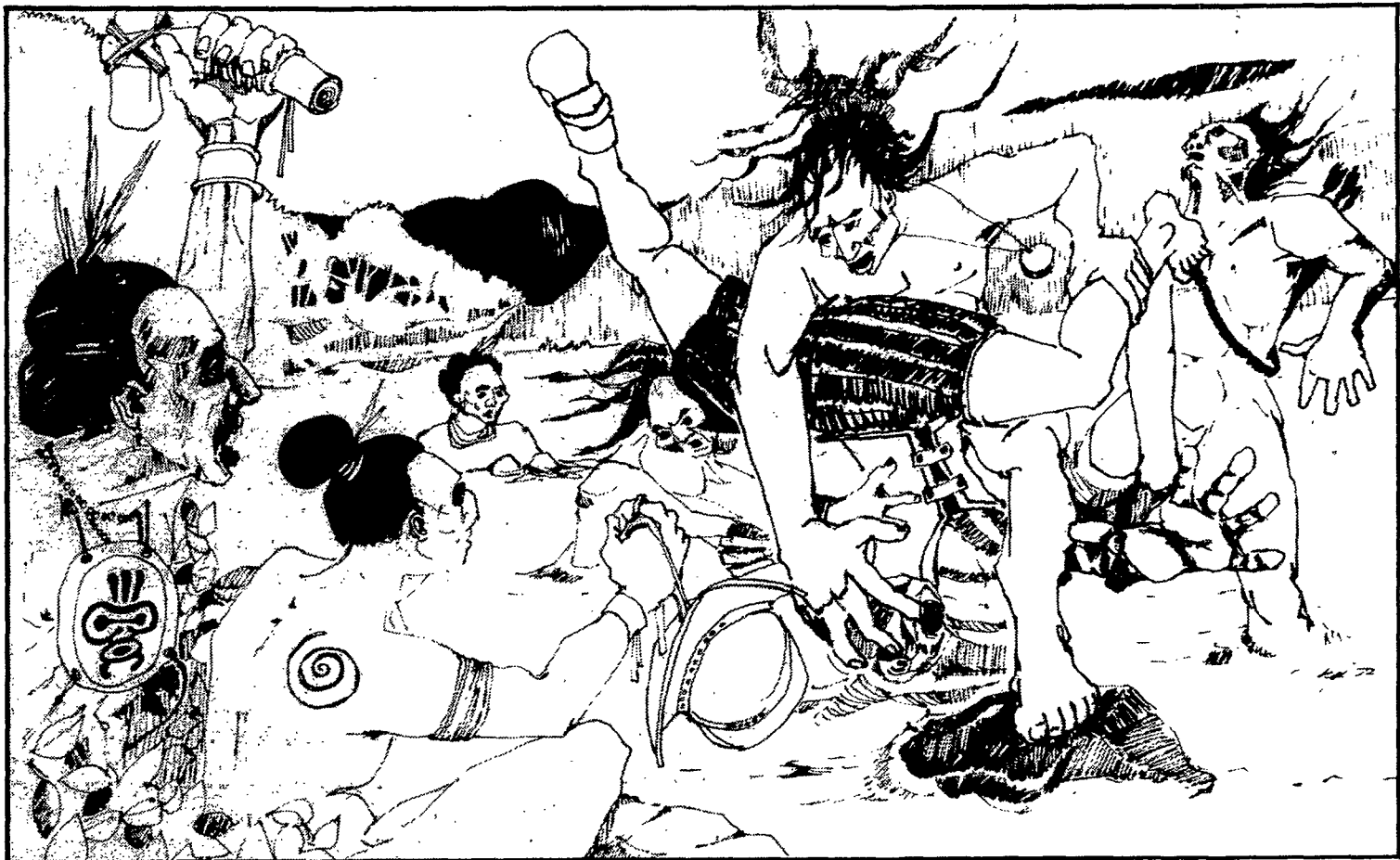
Borrowers need nothing more than some form of identification to take out books, the priest said, adding that the usual lending period lasts two weeks. But don't expect Father Tracy to pursue delinquent borrowers.

"We don't charge a fine for four or five years," he joked.

Along with Father Tracy, Brother Luis Ruberte, H.Ch., director of the Spanish Apostolate, serves as one of the two "librarians." Over the past few years, he's noticed that many of the people who browse Biblioteca Guarionex take out Spanish-language histories and historical novels, many of which deal with Puerto Rico.



According to the 'librarians,' this is the most popular book shelf.



This illustration depicts a 16th-century attack on a Spaniard by a group of Tainos, the original inhabitants of Puerto Rico. The picture hangs in a room at the Spanish Apostolate's field office, which houses the Biblioteca Guarionex — named after the counselor to the Tainos Indians who once inhabited what is now known as Puerto Rico.



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Father Laurence Tracy (left), pastoral assistant to the Spanish Apostolate, and Brother Luis Ruberte, H.Ch., director of the Spanish Apostolate, serve as the two 'librarians' for the Biblioteca Guarionex, located at 873 N. Clinton Ave. in Rochester.

Exactly that kind of interest inspired the brother and the priest to open Guarionex in February, 1987, Father Tracy recalled.

"The library was a dream of the Spanish Apostolate to have some resources for the Spanish community," he said.

Patrons at Guarionex can choose from a collection of resources ranging from thick Spanish encyclopedias to danceable pop-music albums.


Biblioteca Guarionex is funded by the diocesan Thanks Giving Appeal, and will receive more than \$16,000 from the 1991 TGA. In addition, the library has been aided by donations from local corporations. Eastman Kodak Co., for example, donated a series of Spanish-language photography books, Father Tracy said.


A number of Hispanic and non-Hispanic educators and artists use the library on a regular basis. But the two "librarians" advised prospective patrons that Biblioteca Guarionex has limited hours. No full-time librarian oversees the place, and Brother Ruberte and Father Tracy spend many hours each week on other apostolate activities, they said.

"Call to make sure we're here," Father Tracy advised.

EDITORS' NOTE: For information in Spanish or English about Biblioteca Guarionex, call the Spanish Apostolate field office at 716/232-4844.

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