

## Get to know Alex Rodriguez: Cicero man carries on boxer brother's legacy

Photos

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The legacy of Francisco "Paco" Rodriguez, a professional boxer and national Golden Gloves champion from Cicero, was selected to represent Chicago and Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network in the 2012 Rose Parade on Jan. 2 in Pasadena, California. His brother, Alex Rodriguez (left), rode on the float in Paco's honor holding his championship belt, along with Alexis Sloan (right), the recipient of Paco's heart who held a photo of the fallen boxer.

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Julie Sestan recommends this.



Berwyn, IL — When Francisco "Paco" Rodriguez died as a result of a boxing match in November 2009, his brother Alex knew his life was about to change.

But he had no idea that Paco's decision to be an organ donor also would become a defining part of his legacy.

Paco Rodriguez was fighting in a title bout in Philadelphia when he sustained massive head trauma that would claim his life. Although he had discussed organ donation with his wife, his family did not know of Paco's plans.

"We never discussed it," said Alex. "Him being the youngest one, we always thought I'll be gone way before he's gone."

Paco's heart, lungs, liver, pancreas and both kidneys wound up saving the lives of five people, including his own uncle, who lives in Chicago. Despite the wrenching loss, the Rodriguezes find solace in the fact that Paco's decision saved so many lives.

Alex Rodriguez, who lives in Cicero, rode on a float in the Rose Parade on Monday. He's also been featured on national news broadcasts, including a 17-minute package on ESPN.

The single works daily so he can finish work by 2 p.m. and be home in time to greet his children after school.

In his spare time, Alex is an organ donor advocate, specializing in the Latino community. He volunteers with Gift of Hope, an area non-profit organization that aims to boost organ donations, by giving speeches and simply talking to people.

"A lot of people have changed their mind once I tell them about my brother's story," Alex said. "There's a lot of myths out there and I believed a lot of the myths myself before I was a donor and before I was involved in this."

Although boxing cost Rodriguez his brother, it's an indelible lineage that he doesn't begrudge. Boxing has been a tradition in the Rodriguez family, and their father Evaristo fought professionally in Mexico and Chicago.

All three of the brothers virtually grew up in gyms rather than running the streets in the Logan Square neighborhood, which could be rough at that time.

"Not everybody passes away doing what they really love and want to do," Alex Rodriguez said. "He loved sport."

Alex remembers Paco as a giving person who frequently stopped his training to help a child at the gym. He even once gave the belt back to a fan after a fight. He wound up walking out into a cold Chicago night with nothing but a jacket.

But Alex Rodriguez hopes his children see Paco as something more: a hero.

"At the end of the day, there are very few heroes we actually have in real life," he said. "But I think my niece would be the one who can say with a lot of honor and a lot of pride that her father is a hero and he saved lives."

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