

# The NABO connection

By JENNIFER BURDEN

*jennifer@buffalobulletin.com*

NABO is synonymous with Basque festivities across the nation, but achieving that notoriety wasn't always easy for the North American Basque Organizations.

Founded in 1973, NABO was created to support and preserve Basque heritage in North America. Founders of the organization faced a long history of limited communication between Basque provinces, and the lack of communication was carried over the Atlantic when many Basques immigrated to North America.

"It started with a group of people from different Basque organizations around the western United States," said NABO President Valerie Arrechea. "They had contact with each other informally, so they decided to get together and formalize something to facilitate communication between different Basque organizations. They worked together with the purpose of furthering Basque culture in the United States."

Arrechea said her father is Basque and one of the members who helped found NABO, creating, for her, a personal connection to the organization.

"It's something I grew up with," said Arrechea. "I'm not only a first generation Basque in San Francisco, but I've grown up going to NABO conventions. I have three kids that I would like to see participate and have that as well. It's personal because I want to see something I've grown up with continue and see it furthered and stay important."

Arrechea said the membership and interest in NABO is increasing both in organizations and events.

"There is no single way to be Basque," said Arrechea. "The more organizations we have involved, the more ways people can participate. Our organization can't stay



stagnant. It has to be constantly changing. We want to be current and encourage our younger generation to be involved in any which way they can."

NABO started with a group of seven different organizations and has grown to include 43 organizations (clubs) in the United States and two clubs in Canada. The organization has connected Basque clubs across the nation and the world, protecting and promoting their local history. NABO allows member clubs to pool their resources, creating a web of communication and ideas.

"No culture can continue if they are in isolation," said Arrechea. "Linking communities is important."

NABO sponsors activities and events, including an annual mus tournament (Basque poker) that started in

The North American Basque Organizations, or NABO was founded in 1973.

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Oldest American Basque Club:  
Kern County Basque Club,  
Bakersfield, Calif.

Newest American Basque Club:  
Rhode Island Basque Club.

1977 and a Pelota (handball) tournament.

Even as Basque immigration to the United States began to dwindle, the organization found a way to pass down their heritage with a two-week Basque culture summer camp for kids, called Udaleku.

"Most importantly, we have a summer camp for kids to bring them together and teach them about Basque culture, like dance, song, music, sports, cooking," said Arrechea. "It's important because it gives them a sense of who they are and what their culture is. It creates friendships that last a lifetime and reinforces that connection. That's our challenge; not only to keep this going but somehow make sure it is relative and important to the next generation."



# Basque translations



**Basque is phonetic so everything is pronounced.**  
**Basic pronunciation rules:**

**a** ah as in father  
**e** ay (but cut off the "y" sound) as in fate  
**l** ee as in beet  
**o** oh (but stop yourself before you let your mouth slide into a "w" at the end)  
**u** oo as in toot  
 Z = s  
 S = between s and sh  
 Tx = ch  
 D between two vowels = th like in the

**Counting:**

1	Bat, baino	2	Bi, biga	3	Hiru
4	Lau	5	Bost	6	Sei
7	Zazpi	8	Zortzi	9	Bederatz
		10	Hamar		

**Hello** – kaixo (kay-sho), agur (agoor), adio (adeeyo)

**Yes** – bai (bye), ba (bah)

**No** – ez (s)

**Good day** – Egun on (Egoon own)

**Good afternoon** – Arratsaldeon (arrachalde-own)

**Good night** – Gabon (gab-own)

**How are you?** – zer moduz? (ser modooz) Nola zira? (Nolah seera)

Zelan zagoz (selan souse)

**What's your name?** – Nola duzu izena? (Nola doosue isena)

Zein da zure izena? (sane da sue-re isena) Zer da zure izena? (ser da sue-re isena)

**My name is** – Ni \_\_\_ naiz. (knee \_\_\_ nice) Ni \_\_\_ niz

(knee \_\_\_ niece) Nire izena \_\_\_ da. (nire isena \_\_\_ th-a)

**Monday** – astelehena (ashte-lehena)

**Tuesday** – asteartea (ashte- art-ea)

**Wednesday** – asteazkena (ashte – ass-ken-ah)

**Thursday** – osteguna (oshte-goon-a)

**Friday** – ostirala (oshte-ra-la)

**Saturday** – larunbata (la-roon-bah-ta), ebiakoitza (ebeeakoitsa)

**Sunday** – igandea (ehgandea)

**Where are you from?** – Nongoa zara? (Nowngo sarah) Nongoa zira? (Nowngo see-ra)

**Please** – mesedez (mese-thes), plazer baduzu (placer badusue)

**Thank you** – Eskerrik asko, mila esker, esker anitz (eskair-eek ashkoe)

**Excuse me** – barkatu (bar-cat-oo)

**Welcome to Buffalo** – ongi etorri Buffalora (owngi ehtorree Buffalo-ra)

**Goodbye** – Agur (agoor), Adio (adeeyo), adiorik ez (adeeyo-reek s)

**See you later** – ikusi arte (ikooshi artay), gero arte (ghetto art-ay), ikus artio (eekoosh arteeyo)

**God bless you** – Jainkoak bedienka zaitzala – this is literally

May God bless you, but if you are looking for a sneeze response: doministiko, jesus, salud



# The genius of the language

## A study in Basque

By JENNIFER BURDEN

*jennifer@buffalobulletin.com*

**D**avid Romtvedt knows Spanish, French and a little Portuguese, but learning those languages was nothing compared to learning Basque. Romtvedt is taking Basque language classes through the Basque government and has been since September 2010.

"Deciding to take the class had a lot to do with my wife's family," said Romtvedt, who married into the Simon Iberlin family. "And, I play music for the local Basque dancers. It was something I wanted to do."

To take the classes, Romtvedt had to be sponsored by the local Big Horn Basque Club, a member of the North American Basque Organizations (NABO). Students of the class have to be approved and accepted by the Basque government.

"If you drop out of the class, the club has to pay for the course," said Romtvedt. "If you finish the class, there is no charge. It is an incentive to finish."

In March, Romtvedt traveled to Lazkao, Spain, to participate in an intensive three-week language program. Before he left, Romtvedt said he was a little nervous.

"A friend of mine said, 'You will now finally begin to understand who we are,'" said Romtvedt.

When Romtvedt returned to the United States, he said the coursework was intense as he spent six hours a day in the classroom and an several additional hours doing homework, but he had a fantastic time.

"I feel very strongly about the honorable struggle of the Basque people to keep their culture alive and vibrant," said Romtvedt. "We can be grateful for the small towns protecting the language during the Franco dictatorship in Spain. It was country people that kept the language alive, and you get a real feel for that in the small towns."

Romtvedt said for some Basque natives, speaking Basque in their homeland is rare as there is a strong Spanish influence.

"Slightly under half the people in the Basque region speak Basque," said Romtvedt. "Many people speak only Spanish in the Basque country. It's split by towns, and some towns speak almost entirely Basque."

Historically, the Basque language was very different in each part of the Basque country, including the three provinces in France.

"There was never schooling in the academy," said Romtvedt. "It was just people in the villages. Before the death of Franco, a Basque national language academy was created."

After Franco's death, the Spanish regions were granted the right to be autonomous within their historical language areas.

"They suddenly had control," said Romtvedt. "They started reshaping things like education and the language to be a nationally-used medium of communication. They had Basque radio, Basque magazines, and Basque movies. The language became more standardized."

The language held its regional dialects, much like many languages have, but Basque became a nationally unified language.

Euskara, or Basque, is a language unto itself. The Basque language may have similar words to Latin or Spanish, but the grammar and structure are completely unrelated to any known European language.

"What is weird and magical is the way they think about the verb," said Romtvedt. "The verb tells you the object, subject and indirect object. For a verb like 'I have eaten,' there are hundreds of forms of have."

In French there is a term that means "the genius of the language." Romtvedt said they claim the genius of the language shapes how you say something and what you can think about.

"If you don't have a word for green, you may not be able to think of green," said Romtvedt. "Every language shapes you mentally."

To learn the language, Romtvedt's classes consist of writing, listening and watching videos. He has weekly lessons and assignments.

"Those lessons are given to you with dates to complete them," said Romtvedt. "They say it is supposed to take six hours a week. I found it takes at least 10 hours."

Romtvedt said he has a year and a half left in the program.

"It's called a teacher training program," said Romtvedt. "Their hope is that people will teach the language when they are finished with the course. As a beginner, I wouldn't feel confident to be a Basque language teacher, but maybe at some point I could teach."





# A familiar sound

## Basque radio station gave a sense of home for 40 years

By JENNIFER BURDEN

jennifer@buffalobulletin.com

It was December 1956. Sheep wagons dotted the plains and mountains of Johnson County. Loneliness settled in as the sheepherders, many of whom were Basque, hunkered down, and the wind blew in another storm.

The only source of communication for the herders was a radio. The Basques were thousands of miles from home; thousands of miles from familiarity, but that absence of a connection to their home was soon to be filled.

A familiar language came through the speakers.

"Kaixo," said a voice, proceeded by a list of birthdays, anniversaries, music and sheep and cattle sales, all about and for the Basques of Johnson County.

"It was for the herders," said Domingo Martirena, who was a key component in the inception of the Basque radio hour. "They had radios, and we wanted to talk to them. Being a sheepherder is a pretty lonely life."

For one hour every Sunday, KBBS 1450 AM was filled with Basque music, news, jokes and stories. It was a connection to home for those so far from it, and that hour continued for 40 years.

"Everything was in Basque," said Martirena. "They didn't speak English and neither did I at that time."

Martirena himself immigrated to Wyoming when he was only 23. He knew that loneliness was the only companion for a sheepherder.

"I was talking with Jeanette (Esponda) Maxwell, who had the station. We thought, 'Why not have a program for the Basque people?'" said Martirena. "Especially for the herders. It was big for the herders. They sure liked it."

Another Johnson County Basque, Jean Cinquambre, was a part of the radio station for over 30 years.

Cinquambre said it cost \$900 a year for that one-hour program.

"That was a long time ago," said Cinquambre. "That used to be a lot of money."

Cinquambre was an announcer for the program. He said the show had to be taped on Thursday, even though it wouldn't air until Sunday.

"First, I say hello to everyone," said Cinquambre. "I would play the first tune and wish one nice week for everyone. The music would finish, and I would say who was in the hospital. Someone had a baby. Someone selling a lamb or cattle."

For those 40 years, Basques tuned in to hear their native language, but after 40 years, interest faded.

"The idea was to talk to sheepherders," said Martirena. "After 40 years, there was not enough interest. There were no sheepherders. The Basque community was shrinking as there were no more coming from the old country."

In the early and mid 1900s, Basques were drawn to Johnson County for sheep herding because of the potential income. Large sheep outfits were formed, but as time went on, the industry started to die out.

"It's a heck of a life, a sheepherders life," said Martirena. "What they did is build fences to keep the sheep in the pastures, so there is no sheepherders."

Martirena said the younger generations of Basque don't know the life in a sheep wagon because they never experienced it.

"They have to ask us what it was like to live in a sheep wagon," said Martirena. "All of the Basque sheepherder traditions will fade away. The next generation will be less interested, then less and less."

When the Basque radio station began, Martirena said there were probably 200 Basques in the community.

"That is dying out," said Martirena. "Now, there is only about 10 Basques born in the Basque country that live here. That's about all."

Martirena said in the next 10 years, those 10 could be gone and the traditions and culture of the Basque could go with them.

"I hope that doesn't happen," said Martirena.







# A history of Johnson County Basques

By Alberta Escoz

**F**or over 100 years, the Basque culture has been perpetuated in Johnson County. The early immigrant parents were often both Basque and so the children grew up speaking the language. The card game, *mus*, was played in homes, in the sheep camps and at local taverns. In many homes, each January, pigs were butchered and sausage was made.

The one large-scale gathering was on Aug. 15. Each year on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, most of the Basques families would gather on the mountains for Catholic Basque Mass, supper, and a night of dancing.

From 1956 until 1996, the Basque Radio Program could be heard at noon on Sundays. Most Basques in the area would tune to KBBS 1450 AM to hear one hour of "music, news, messages and views by and for the Basque of this area." But through time, individuals became more involved in "mainstream" activities and were not maintaining the culture.

Beginning in 1962, Catholic missionary priests were coming from France to celebrate Mass and to bring the sacraments to Basque people of the American West.

In 1979, Mary Kay Maxwell began working with several young people and taught them several traditional Basque dances. Those involved were Jamie Stafford, Renee Garland, Jackie Moriarity, Brian Leibee, Pierre Escoz, Jean A. Escoz and Joe Amestoy. That same year some adults began performing as a group.

In November 1981 a group of Basque people met in Buffalo in an effort to renew and preserve the Basque

Culture. Mary Camino was born and raised in Buffalo but had lived in California for a time. There she had been involved with Basque Clubs and was anxious to see such an organization in Buffalo.

The first effort was a state-wide organization. The committee was composed of Jean Cinquambre, Mary Camino, Connie Camino, Charles Irigaray, Mike Reculosa, Mary Kay Stafford, Dennis and Renee Lawrence and Domingo Martirena.

People from outside of Wyoming who offered assistance were: William Douglas, noted author, anthropologist and scholar from the University of Nevada in Reno, Janet Inda, NABO president at that time, Dennis Coelho, folk arts coordinator for the Wyoming Council on the Arts, Father J. P. Cauchenaute, Basque missionary priest. The group was formed, by-laws established and a nine member board of directors was chosen. Dues were established to help fund activities. Several activities were carried out and all were very successful.

By 1983, it was determined that most interest was centered in Johnson County and so a more local approach was taken. The newly formed group chose the name of Big Horn Basque Club and sponsored a contest to design the club logo. Pierre Escoz submitted the winning design. A club motto was also chosen. It is *Zarrer Segi* which means "follow the old". The dance group which was actually formed before the club was fully organized chose that club motto as their group name.

Later in 1983, the Big Horn Basque Club became a member of the North American Basque Organizations (NABO). NABO is made up of individual clubs in the United States and Canada. By becoming a member of this larger association, many new activities became available to the members. Instructors came to Buffalo

and offered classes in dance and music. NABO sponsors music tournaments, music camps and sports camps each year.

Through the Basque Club, our youth became aware of the Basque Studies Program which enables people to attend school in Europe. Local youth who took advantage of this were Lorraine Kuhn, Kate Camino and Jean Albert Escoz. David and Catlain Romtvedt have studied music and the Basque language, Euskera, in Spain. In recent years, another program called *Gaszte Mundo* which means "young people's world," was begun. This involves a three-week study in the Basque Country. Some of the topics offered were language, music, dance and Basque history. Local members who have participated in this program are Mick, Marty and Angie Camino.

For 30 years, club members have been very busy. The Big Horn Basque Club has hosted three previous NABO conventions. The one this year will be the fourth. The many club functions have made it possible to renew old acquaintances and make new friends. For some, it has brought joy at being able to sing the songs of their youth and listen to musicians from "the old country."

For others, it was a chance to visit the sheep camps where their fathers or grandfathers began a life in "a new world." For many it became an opportunity to visit the homeland of their ancestors, to learn the ancient language or play the *txistu*, a unique musical instrument similar to the flute. Many people in this area have learned the dances and the card game, *mus*. For still others it was the cooking and enjoying traditional Basque food.

Hopefully, interest will remain and the Big Horn Basque Club will continue to preserve and promote the culture as we continue to "*zarrer segi!* Follow the old."