

# Lorenzo's Hometown

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## Lorenzo's Hometown

Lorenzo Lujan grew up in Morenci, Arizona. His father worked in the Morenci Mine, and his brothers, brothers in law, uncles and his wife's family all worked in the mine. He said, "[Morenci] was like a big family--and I don't just mean literal family members, the whole town was a family. Morenci was the type of town where you didn't have to lock your doors at night; everybody knew everybody else." But he doesn't relish the idea of returning to his hometown. "Phelps Dodge broke up that whole community. Ninety percent of the people left," he said. "So, when I go to Morenci now, it isn't the same town I grew up in."

Now, in addition to teaching Machine Technologies courses at Pima Community College, he is the Instrument Shop Supervisor in the Chemical Engineering lab at the University of Arizona. My roommate works in the shop he supervises and comes home with some of the most comic stories I've [heard](#) in a while. Between eating their own weight in burros and competing with each other in the latest computer games, they manufacture precise custom equipment that is used in experiments involving everything from lasers to rat dissection. I became interested in this fascinating coexistence of Mexican food, video games and [drill](#) presses when I learned of Lorenzo's connection to Morenci.

What could have possibly happened to the small mining community of Morenci to cause a mass exodus? The answer: STRIKE. But, not just any strike could break up this community. The Morenci [Mine](#) Strike of 1983 lasted for over 30 months and left many of Morenci's residents unemployed. The '83 strike pitted half the community against the other, and brought the in outside world with an alarming show of force.

In 1983, Phelps Dodge, one of the world's largest mining corporations, was in serious trouble. In 1982, they lost \$74million mostly due to bad investments and management personnel issues, but the price of copper was hovering just below the break-even point as well. They had to make cuts to help recoup their financial losses, so in April of 1982, they laid off their entire Arizona and Texas work forces totaling over 3,400 hourly employees.

In May of 1983 when the miners' contract negotiations began, the unions wanted to keep the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) and the medical benefits already in their contracts.

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