Latino entrepreneur Ron Romero reminisced of his father’s story: the night he met musical legend Louis Armstrong. In fact, Armstrong granted him backstage access at a show and signed a picture they took together. Hearing his father’s passion as he recited this star-studded story motivated Romero to pursue meeting his own musical heroes – people he’s not only met but worked with since founding the Illinois Rock and Roll Museum as a nonprofit organization.

As Executive Director, Romero leads a council that also inducts artists into their Hall of Fame, already enshrining some like Stix and REO Speedwagon. The Route-66 venue — located at 9 W Cass St, Joliet — has only opened the gift shop to the public, but Romero has found engagement with the project all over despite starting it in 2019. He attributes the success to his upbringing, especially the musical ear and ambition his father passed onto him.

Moreover, his father — born in downtown Mexico City (1922) — supplied the family with “nearly every musical instrument you could think of,” providing the resources that would inspire Romero’s talent and aspirations. Decades later, his father still valued learning new things, such as unfamiliar instruments or techniques. Romero spoke proudly of his father’s willingness to step outside his comfort zone, noting how it informed his own work ethic. “At one time, he said, ‘If I quit, I’m going to die,’ and that principle stuck with me.”

His father continued working long after retiring, tutoring Hispanic students in English and other subjects — a prime example of his persistent attitude. Beforehand, his father balanced a full-time civil engineering job with a side mission: collaborating with an attorney to assist immigrants in obtaining their citizenship. “My dad used to make a very big deal out of ‘Never judge a book by its cover,’” Romero said. “He’d also say, ‘Don’t judge a man by the color of his skin.’” Aware of music’s ability to transcend cultural differences and eager to embrace such differences, he imputes his instincts and nonprofit mentality to his relationship with his father.

Unfortunately, Romero’s father passed away in November 2017. He remains both proud and grateful for the values his father instilled within him and the musical lifestyle he espoused. Above all, Romero hopes his father “looks down and is pleased” with the overall project in honor of all he contributed.

Romero and staff are working towards opening the museum to the public, installing each first-floor exhibit before anyone is allowed access. However, the building’s gift shop is now open and available online as well. Visit [www.roadtorock.org](http://www.roadtorock.org) to donate and learn more.