

Jackpot winner avoids media to claim prize

Staff and Wire Reports

Published 4:00 am, Friday, June 29, 2001

[Alcario Castellano](#), the 66-year-old retired San Jose supermarket clerk who claimed California's largest-ever Lottery jackpot, \$141 million, spent this morning dodging reporters and TV cameramen in an effort to avoid a media circus.

Instead, Castellano was to hold a press conference this afternoon at the [DeAnza Hotelin](#) downtown San Jose -- and hope that all the hoopla generated by his colossal win subsides. Reporters swarmed around Castellano's well-kept house on a dead-end street in the quiet west San Jose neighborhood of Cambrian Park but found no one answering the door, despite a welcoming sign: "Mi Casa Es Su Casa" (my house is your house).

[Sheila Reno](#), who has been a next door neighbor of Castellano and his wife Carmen, 62, for the past 7 1/2 years, said she was delighted to learn that he had become a multimillionaire. "I'm so excited for him. He's very friendly, very giving, always happy -- he's just a wonderful person," Reno said.

Reno said that she talked with Castellano yesterday but that he did not mention that he had won the lottery.

Castellano came to a [California Lottery](#) district office in San Francisco at 4:40 p.m. yesterday with the winning ticket, spokeswoman [Norma Minas](#) said.

Castellano chose the one-time cash option, which means within the next six weeks he will receive \$70,794,364. After taxes, Castellano will net about \$42.3 million.

Minas said Castellano was quiet when he turned in his ticket, accompanied by his wife and several other family members -- one of whom videotaped the exchange.

"They were nervous," Minas said.

[Allan Wang](#), 56, owner of Union Avenue Liquors, where Castellano bought his winning ticket, was posing for photos this morning in front of his store, which now has a sign advertising "Millionaire Made Here."

Wang said Castellano has played nearly every drawing, usually marking a couple of his own numbers and buying \$5 worth of quick picks. His maximum play has been \$20, Wang said.

"He talks with us, always with a smile, and he's always hoping that sometime he'll do it (win the Lottery), sometime, some day," said Wang, who, as vendor of the winning ticket, stands to win \$750,000 as a result of Castellano's good fortune.

Reno noted that Castellano has been the kind of good neighbor who watches out for other people and tosses his neighbors' newspapers onto their porches. "The kids love him. He's a great friend. He'd do anything for you," she said. Besides, Reno said, "he buys Girl Scout cookies from my daughter."

Castellano allowed only one newspaper interview yesterday, with the [San Jose Mercury News](#), saying he wanted to avoid the media circus associated with winning such a bonanza.

The paper described Castellano and his wife as active and popular members of San Jose's Mexican American community.

He has been a leader of the local chapter of the [American GI Forum](#), a Latino veterans group that produces annual [Cinco de Mayo](#) and Fiestas Patrias festivals. Carmen Castellano is a semiretired secretary who serves on a number of community boards, including a Mexican folk dance group. Alcario Castellano always attends local Latino parades, mariachi festivals, charity fund-raisers and other community events with his video camera -- indeed, the paper called him "the Mexican-American community's unofficial videographer."

Two weeks ago, the couple was thinking of selling their house and moving south, the paper reported. Now they plan to stay, enjoying their three grandchildren and helping their community.

Castellano said he wants to help his daughters through graduate school. His wife added they may spread some of the money among community organizations.

"I suppose we'll set up some things, including a Castellano family scholarship," Carmen Castellano said.

Alcario Castellano was born in New Mexico and moved with his family to California to pick crops when he was 9. He volunteered for the Army after high school in the mid-1950s.

According to the paper, Castellano bought his ticket Saturday, letting the machine pick the numbers. On Sunday, he awoke at dawn, brewed coffee and plucked his ticket from the refrigerator where it was posted with a magnet.

He sat down to read the newspaper and began matching the numbers, one by one.

"Now, what's going on here?" he said to himself, the paper reported. "Is this real? I can't believe it."