

Soy Unica, Soy Latina— Celebrating 10 years

The Soy Unica, Soy Latina Rally is celebrating a decade of existence. The rally focuses in on empowering young Latina girls from the ages of 7 to 18 by raising self awareness, instilling pride and giving the girls the opportunity to get access to information and people that otherwise, may be unobtainable. Each year the rally grows in popularity and many times, breaks its attendance records from years before.

What makes the rally truly unique is that it is held at the University of Rochester, allowing the young girls to get a feel for a real college campus. It provides many of them with the first opportunity to truly imagine a college education as part of their lives. The rally provides workshops for the girls and some of the topics have included: nutrition, self-esteem, handling money, healthy and unhealthy relationships, and career planning. Parents are encouraged to attend the rally as well as workshops, which are provided to give them information that relates to raising young women.

Local agencies also partake in the event by having booths available with information about their resources and programs. To entice young girls to attend, the rally also includes: music, dance, raffles and the very popular Quinceañera fashion show finale where girls from the community model their quince gowns and one lucky girl wins a gown for her own quince.

Iveth Reynolds currently oversees the SUSL rally. She became involved in 2004 and

has been chairing it for five years now. She believes the rally is important for several reasons. "It's important to expose the girls to a different reality. There are internal struggles that these young girls face and the rally opens up some of these issues." She continues by adding, "It (the rally) allows them to know how to successfully rise through these challenges." President of Latinas Unidas, Daisy Rivera Algarin agrees and further explains that, "The rally brings to life Latinas Unidas mission which is 'Latinas Unidas fosters opportunities that will promote unity, cultural identity and the presence of the Latina Woman



in the community' and we are proud that we can reach girls at such a young age."

The first year the rally was brought to the U of R was in 2007. That year, Algarin and Reynolds both heard words that will forever resonate in their hearts and minds. Reynolds remembers a group of girls taking the tour at the campus that is offered during the rally. Upon its conclusion she heard one of the young Latinas say, 'I want to go to college.' Reynolds elaborates on just how profound that moment was. "The opportunity to see and experience more had already changed the course of this young girl's life." Algarin agrees and says that, "No longer were we asking are you going to college. Instead, we are now asking where are you going to college? Our mission is accomplished as moments like these produce an actual paradigm shift."

The rally has gained the attention of local

celebrities like Norma Holland as well as names known throughout the United States and beyond. Daisy Martinez, a chef from the Food Network who celebrates being Latina through sharing her love of culinary art and her cooking show and cook books. Reynolds explains, "She was one of the madrinas that stood out not just for the girls but for the parents. She opened up their eyes to health issues that are important to the Latino community."

Growing up, both Algarin and Reynolds had their struggles with their identity as Latinas. Reynolds explains, "I would of liked to of had mentors that I could reach out to. My parents being from Nicaragua, I didn't have anyone to guide me professionally. I had to work my way through the system and figure things out on my own." Algarin explains that for her, her parents were her mentors.

"My mother and father were my role models because they took me to community events where I met women like Nancy Padilla, Gladys Santiago and Nydia Padilla Rodriguez. At the time, they didn't really know me but they did influence me with their love for the community."

The rally is really an opportunity that Rochester Latina girls cannot miss out on. Either parent can take their daughter and there are workshops for both parents and girls alike. Algarin explains "It's a celebration of culture and the opportunities that are available. It's a chance for parents to guide their kids and have them aspire to college. It really is an invaluable opportunity."

Find us online at
www.latinasunidas.org

Honoring Four Inspirational Latinas

Latinas Unidas has been honoring women of Latin heritage with their annual Reconocimiento Awards luncheon for eighteen years now. The mission is to recognize the accomplishments of Latinas in Rochester as well as throughout Monroe County who often times, may be overlooked or under praised in their careers, schools or even in their volunteer work.

As in other years, this year Latinas Unidas honored women that have accomplished great things through their professional work as well as through their volunteer efforts. Just knowing the vast array of talents, skills and compassion that each woman has is amazing on its own. What brings it to another level is that they have managed to accomplish so much all while successfully managing other areas of their lives including achieving educational goals, raising their children or facing adversity. In other words, these women definitely embody the saying: 'I am Latina, hear me roar!'

Melisa Campos Leadership Achievement



Melisa Campos was honored as the 2011 Reconocimiento Awards Leadership Achievement Recipient. Melisa is now serving her second term as a board member of the Rochester City School District. She also works as a master trainer for the local operations center for Dale Carnegie. Melisa is not just a leader in her careers but also has a leadership role in her home life. She's a wife and mother to a 2-year-old boy and a eight-month-old little girl.

Melisa received a shock when this past fall, she was prepared to do a Dale Carnegie awards presentation for Wegmans but that day, the tables were turned. "I remember hearing, 'actually Melisa, today we're going to be presenting you with an award.'" She continues by saying, "I was shocked for winning the

award and also where I was." She is proud yet humble about her accomplishments as she explains, "I still have a lot more work within me, this is not a culmination of my career but it represents that I'm leading my life with intention."

Melisa shares her sentiments about the award ceremony itself. "It was beautiful. I wondered; who is this person she's talking about? It was so sweet." She continues on as she explains the highlights of this special day. "What I loved most was being able to give kudos to everyone that has supported me. Those people were all present and they are: my husband, kids, parents and brother, but most especially my husband of six years."

Part of what makes Melisa a leader is that she knows how to put a positive spin on things, keep a level head and stay on top of her commitments. A trait that is really admirable especially on days when all doesn't go exactly as planned. On the day I interviewed Melisa, she had some car trouble but was still willing to do the interview as she figured out what to do. Her response to the situation was, "I try to keep a balance even if something goes wrong."

Balance is always the goal but Melisa confesses to often feeling the ever insistent pull that many of us women feel as we try and juggle it all. She does always make her family a priority. "I always make sure my kids are first. I may not always be able to put them to sleep but I try to plan big chunks of time with them. I also make sure that my husband and I go over our schedules weekly so that we know whose doing what for the week and who is picking up the kids and that kind of thing."

Besides her own family life, Melisa has a responsibility to other families and their children. As a school board representative Melisa feels that "The focus for RSD needs to be on Student achievement and customer service. We want parents to be engaged."

Melisa leaves us with these inspirational words. "The principals (that ones she leads her own life by) are pretty timeless. It's the things my mom instilled in me which are, to

make sure that you're beautiful on the inside first. It's easy to say but very hard to apply when everything is going wrong. It's also having the strength to deal with those that are chauvinistic. You have to figure out how to have strength but still remain classy."

Geena Cruz Volunteer Service Award



This year's volunteer service award goes to a woman whose professional and volunteer work are all about helping others. Geena Cruz is a great example of a busy woman who

works and has children but still makes time to volunteer.

Some of the volunteer projects she's involved in are: Project URGE, coalition of black unionists, Diversity Gem and The Federation of Social Workers. Geena points out the common theme in her volunteer work. "They all involve empowering people and that's what I like to do. I like to see people becoming their best selves. I always like things that have to do with helping others. I got that from my mother."

Geena was surprised when what she thought she was attending a work related emergency meeting only to find out it was all a conspiracy to announce to her that she was selected for a Reconocimiento Award. "I believe it. I started crying. I had so many feelings going through my head. I attend the event every year and it's always beautiful. It was just so extra special this year to be honored and have my family present as well as people from the groups I volunteer with and from my job. I was proud to be put in the same group as the other women that were recognized."

Geena works for the department of social services as an examiner. In her role, she helps with the opening and closing of cases. She also helps clients to become self sufficient. Geena's

volunteer work is really an extension of what she does at her day job. "The fact that I can help others helps is what motivates me to volunteer my time. Helping issues and people like: domestic violence, The Puerto Rican Parade, the unions and at my church are motivating things for me and I enjoy doing it."

Geena has a 25-year-old son and a daughter who is 14-years-old. Her story is one of triumph even though she faced a lot of adversity. "I was a teenage mom and I don't feel that being a teen mom should be a reality show (referring to the MTV hit 'Teen Mom'). I think you should wait and do things the easier, right way. Getting married and getting your career together should always be priorities before having children." Geena firmly believes in this but does have something to add for those that may be facing the challenging road of being a teen mother. "Just because you have a baby young, don't let it stop you from being who you want to be. It won't be easy and I was lucky because my family helped me through it and supported me so that I could work and go to school."

Finding comfort and strength in her spirituality has always helped Geena. "It keeps me sane. I thank God everyday when I get up." She also says that being raised in the city of Rochester certainly has its challenges. What has helped me is having the ability to separate different aspects of my life. My friends, career, raising my children and my volunteer work but I always remain true to myself, I never forget where I come from."

Geena tells us reminds us that. "Everybody somehow, someday should always volunteer and give back to the community."

Belimar Velásquez

Career Achievement



Belimar Velásquez's career holds a large spectrum of expertise and diversity. She transitioned from the world of scientific logic as a research scientist and then made her way into

the people focused field of marketing and now is the Director of Marketing and Inside Sales for Carestream in the United States and in Canada. The decision to make such a change was all hers because she noticed herself gravitating more towards marketing type of opportunities. "Managing my transitions is quite an accomplishment and what I'm most proud of. Each time I took on a new position, it came with its struggles because you have a learning curve to overcome. That plus getting accustomed to a new role always comes with challenges."

With an MBA from Simon School of Business, and University of Rochester and a BS degree in Optics with a Minor in Spanish Literature also from the University of Rochester, Belimar's education has definitely given her the education necessary to have the diverse and interesting career she has lead. She acknowledges the fact that from the outside the worlds of science and that of communications may seem like night and day but she says there are some similarities. "The project management aspect is very similar. The difference is that in marketing we find ways to best promote products to customers and on the scientific end of things we think of ways that a product can best benefit consumers."

Belimar is proud of her heritage but admits that there are times, where it hasn't always been perceived as a strength. "It has been both (a hindrance and benefit) from a diverse perspective it's great. I can contribute diversity of thought because I've been influenced by other cultures. But the negative aspect of it is that there aren't many successful Latinas in the fields I've worked in." Belimar also experienced being under estimated early on. "When I was declaring my major in physics a counselor at the University of Rochester doubted that I had the skills to complete that kind of degree. Being a Latina and straight from Puerto Rico they seemed to doubt if I had the right background for it."

Belimar believes that organizations like Latinas Unidas are a great way to break stereo types and give insight into the abilities on the Latin woman. "I've attended the luncheon before and I'm very proud that they have a way to highlight achievements made by Latinas. Receiving an award was overall a very humbling experience. It's a great time to reflect and show gratitude to the organization and the people that have showed me support over the years. The event was of great quality and very organized."

Having two teenage daughters of her own, ages thirteen and fourteen, Belimar has a few things she feels are important to instill in young women. "I tell them to focus on faith, that having mentors is important and being ready and willing to change. Also, to work hard because I think it's really important. When you work hard nobody can take that from you. It's hard for anyone to disprove the work you have done."

Surely, Belimar will continue to inspire and work towards achieving even more in her career. She lives by a certain motto. "My mother always said, 'Nothing good has ever been written about cowards.'"

Valeria Delgado

Young Latina Leader



An extraordinary experience changed Valeria's outlook and motivation for life. "My sophomore year, in the summer I took a trip to Ecuador and saw first hand so much poverty and so many people that have never even seen a doctor." Valerie decided to take her journey to another level. "For my senior project, I could have taken the easy route by using that trip for my internship but I decided to go back to Ecuador and I started an initiative to help raise money for seniors citizens. My focus is to help them get acquire funds for medical supplies which they really need."

Valeria Delgado is a proud to be the recipient of the 2011 Young Latina leader award. She is a young woman full of goals, diligence and a big heart. This 17-year-old Webster Thomas High school student admits that the Reconocimiento Award ceremony far exceeded her expectations. "It was really emotional for me. I'm usually not a crier but there were so many people looking up to me." Valerie was so happy to have her parents, Lorena and Ricardo Mendoza at the awards ceremony. "My parents have always been there and have motivated me to help others." She continues on by saying, "It's a very nice recognition and I'm very proud of it. I feel like it boosts your self esteem and makes you determined to do even more. It's such a great honor to be recognized."

Valerie's goals include going to college to get a law degree with a masters in business. She has a specific interest in business law and has some words of encouragement for Latinas girls who want to also want to pursue their educational dreams. "Get involved in high school. So many people don't want to do much. You get to meet so many people when you are involved, you get to do interesting things and it keeps you busy to help you stay away from anything that you should."

Even though she is young her thoughts are detailed, complex and full of wisdom. Valerie's experiences in Ecuador have forever changed her perspective on life. "I try to live my life and not complain about wanting more because I have seen first hand, how so many have so little."

To help Valeria with her fundraising to help senior citizens in Ecuador check out: www.goforthinternational.org, on facebook search manta, Ecuador senior home. ecuador.seniorproject2012@yahoo.com or on facebook search manta, Ecuador senior home.

A Note from the President

Dear Friend and Supporter,

The year 2011 was another exciting year for **Latinas Unidas!** Allow me on behalf of our Latinas Unidas Board and myself to précis our finest moments and thank you for being part of our success.

We began our year with our traditional **Winter Café con Leche** in February which was graciously hosted by our friends at Frontier Corporation. Just like flowers bloom in the spring, so did we!

In March of 2011 we had not just one but three successful events! The **Soy Unica Soy Latina Rally** for girls hosted by the University of Rochester was chaired by Iveth Reynolds. Our **Second Annual Iron Chef Competition** with spotlight celebrity Chef Daisy Martínez was sold out, and our **Latina Woman Scholarship Fundraiser** hosted by amigos, Louise Woerner and Augie Meléndez, raised over \$14,000 to help women return to school!

This has certainly been a year of increase! Our **Café con Leche Series** coordinated by Board member, Rosemarie Gutiérrez, have been exceptional. Our most recent women's holiday networking event held at Wegmans Corporate Headquarters received an unprecedented response, resulting in having to close registration. We reached 75!

The **Latina Woman Scholarship Committee** was reorganized and welcomed new members, Joann Santos and Raquel Serrano. Latinas Unidas partnered with Young Entrepreneur Academy (YEA) and with the support from Tri-Mar Consulting, Pauline Clark

and Caribbean Liquid Sugars provided a \$1,000 scholarship to a deserving young Latina!

Our signature event, **Reconocimiento Awards**, held in the fall was another huge success thanks to our presenting sponsors Kodak, Wegmans and 13WHAM.

During the summer months and throughout the year, we maintained a connection with our communities — uniting, educating, linking resources, and supporting other organizations. Proudly, we promoted **health and wellness fair for Latinas**, organized **Latina focused panels and roundtable sessions**, participated in the **Puerto Rican Parade**, posted many community job openings on our website, mentored and supported the City of Rochester's **Hispanic Heritage Month Planning Committee**, attended the **Women of Distinction Awards**, with keynote speaker América Ferrera and supported the awardee Nydia Padilla-Rodríguez.

Members and friends — none could have been done without your love and support and for that we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Personally, I'd like to thank six very special ladies who are the force behind our organization: Ruth Colón, Vice President; Lori Nolasco, Secretary (former board member 2011); Rosalie Rivera-Arzuaga, Treasurer; Peggy Martínez, At Large; Rosemarie Gutiérrez, At Large and Melissa Rosario-Bailey, At Large.

Looking forward to all that 2012 will bring us!

Daisy

Daisy Rivera-Algarín

President, Latinas Unidas

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Our Mission

"Latinas Unidas fosters opportunities that will promote unity, cultural identity and the presence of the Latina Woman in the community."

Our Vision

"Latinas Unidas encourages and motivates women to be proud of themselves and to assume active and positive roles in society."

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

President: Daisy Rivera Algarín

Vice President: Ruth Colon

Secretary: Lori Nolasco

Treasurer: Rosalie Rivera-Arzuaga

At Large Membership: Peggy Martinez

At Large Events: Rosemarie Gutierrez

At Large Marketing: Melissa Rosario

Dates to Remember

Soy Unica, Soy Latina

Date: Saturday, March 24, 2012

Time: 8:30 am to 2:00 pm

Location: University of Rochester Rochester, NY

Registration is required. Children under 13 must be accompanied by an adult. To register, please **contact Latinas Unidas at 256-8900.**

Iron Chef East High School

Date: Sunday April 1, 2012

Time: 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm

Location: Riverside Convention Center. 123 East Main Street, Rochester, NY

Presented by Latinas Unidas and East High School's Academy of Business, Finance and Management Hospitality and Tourism.

Celebrity Chef **Daisy Martinez** will be the premier judge. Six high school students will compete for several prizes.

For advance tickets and additional information, please contact:

Alecia Zipp-McLaughlin

Program Administrator, East High School

Phone: (585) 288-3130, ext. 6261

Email: alecia.mclaughlin@rcsdk12.org

Verizon café con leche

Date: Thursday, June 14, 2012

Location: to be determined.

Reconocimiento Awards

Date: Friday, November 2, 2012

Become an LU Member

Membership levels:

- Amiga – FREE!
- Hermana – \$25.00/year
- Madrina – \$50.00/year

For a membership application, please visit www.latinasunidas.org and click on Join Us! Please mail your application and check made out to Latinas Unidas:

Latinas Unidas @ Ibero

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