



HISPANIC ASSOCIATION OF ATLANTIC COUNTY

2023 NUESTRO PUEBLO AWARDS HONOREES

Arts and Entertainment

Awarded to an individual who has made a significant contribution to our Hispanic community through their skills, leadership, or portrayal of Latinos in Arts & Entertainment.

Honoree: Arlin Padilla



Arlin Padilla is a highly accomplished professional dancer, performer, and choreographer with over two decades of experience. He began his dance journey at the tender age of five in his native country of Honduras, where he participated in numerous folkloric dance competitions and performing arts programs. In 1997, Arlin moved to the United States to further his training and expand his performance opportunities. Since then, Arlin has performed extensively throughout the United States and the Caribbean, showcasing his talents at a diverse range of events. He has worked with an impressive array of clients, including Hologram USA, Center Stage Entertainment, Taylor's Ent., Pena Productions, Unique Ent., Near Dark Ent., and celebrity rapper Chief Keef. Arlin has also shared the stage with a number of high-profile artists, including Eric Andre, Tiffany, KC and The Sunshine Band, Randy Jones of Village People fame, and Jade Starling of Pretty Poison.

In 2014, he opened Arlin's Dance Spot, a highly successful dance and fitness studio located in Ventnor, New Jersey. The studio specializes in Latin Dance with an international flair, offering top-quality instruction and choreography in a range of styles, including Ballet, Latin Jazz, Contemporary, Hip-Hop, Salsa, Bachata, dance and fitness classes - Zumba, Barre, Cardio Ballet, Brazilian Fusion, and Yoga. In 2016, Arlin was featured in 6abc's Thanksgiving Day Parade, and he also performed as Prince in New York Fashion Week. Arlin is widely respected as a role model for the Hispanic community, thanks to his impressive accomplishments, dedication, and unwavering commitment to promoting and protecting Latin culture while living the American dream.

Community Service

Awarded to an individual who has made a significant contribution to our community through volunteerism, as a provider of social services and/or promoting the welfare of others.

Honoree: Cristian Moreno



Cristian Moreno-Rodriguez is an Atlantic City native and proud son of immigrant parents from Putla Villa de Guerrero, Oaxaca, Mexico. Conscious of his Chicano background, Cristian is deeply passionate about equality, justice, and inclusivity in order to ensure the voice of the Latino and Immigrant community is always heard at the “decision-making table.”

Cristian has dedicated his heart and soul to organizing the community over the past several years. Previously, Cristian has helped fight for equal access to driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants and has advocated for equal Latino representation within local governments, local boards of education, and local police departments. Additionally, he has helped organize efforts to establish Fair & Welcoming state and city progressive policies for immigrants while combating xenophobic legislation and has had the honor of organizing alongside the Mayren-Guzman family in the fight for Justice For Irving. Cristian has also previously served on various executive boards, including as Chair of the Advocacy Committee for the Hispanic Association of Atlantic County, Vice-President of Organizacion Azteca, the Atlantic City Police-Citizen Advisory Board, the statewide Latino Action Network and as the Student Representative on the Stockton University Board of Trustees.

Cristian now serves as the Founder and Executive Director of the nonprofit organization, El Pueblo Unido of Atlantic City Y Pueblos Cercanos. Cristian serves alongside his Brother and Board President of El Pueblo Unido, Irvin Moreno-Rodriguez, and together they have helped organize various marches, vigils, town hall forums, workshops, classes, and protests all in the name of achieving justice, dignity, and respect for El Pueblo, The People!

El Pueblo Unido is a grassroots advocacy organization in New Jersey that seeks to empower the Latino and Immigrant Community in Atlantic City, Pleasantville, and other towns in Atlantic County. El Pueblo Unido's mission focuses on Immigrant Justice, Tenant Justice, Worker Justice, and Student Justice. El Pueblo Unido believes that through Transformative Education, Community Resource Development, Legal Defense, Civic Engagement, and Community Organizing that we can uplift our entire community to always fight the good fight!

Education

Awarded to an individual at any level in the education system in Atlantic County that has made a significant contribution to our community through his/her skills, leadership, or advocacy on educational issues.

Honoree: Cinthya Llerena



Cinthya Llerena has been servicing the Atlantic City public schools for over 20 years. She is currently the District Preschool Coordinator for the Atlantic City Public School District and worked as an educational consultant and coordinator for the Absecon public school district for the last seven years. In addition to those roles, Cinthya enjoys teaching adults ESL classes with La Casa Dominicana. Cinthya obtained her bachelor's degree in accounting and finance from Rutgers University in 2002. After having her first child, she decided to become a teacher and obtained her teaching certification for K-8 and continued furthering her education by obtaining a master's degree in mathematics in 2007, a master's degree in educational leadership in 2010 and various post-graduate endorsements/certifications including Preschool, ESL and Bilingual/Bicultural, Supervisor, and Principal. She is

currently completing her doctorate in educational leadership.

Cinthya enjoys working as a teacher, a preschool coach, a personal coordinator and consultant for teachers as well as coordinating many multicultural festivals and family-oriented activities for Richmond and Pennsylvania Avenue Schools, the City of Atlantic City, Our Lady Star of the Sea and many more organizations and initiatives.

Cinthya's purpose is to support and be an advocate for our Latino community. For this reason, she is an active member of many non-profit organizations such as HAAC and other community outreach activities that support our families and children. When she moved to the United States at the age of 13 with her family, she had the opportunity to meet a handful of Latina friends who helped her transition into a new country, a new language and a new school. She struggled to learn this new life but with the love and support of her parents, family and handful of friends, she was able to reach her potential and achieved many personal goals. Cinthya uses her roles to share her story and teach the younger generation that, "si se puede" or "yes you can". Her three children are her inspiration every day.

Entrepreneurship Nuestro Pueblo Award

Awarded to an individual in the field of business that has made a significant contribution to our community through his/her leadership in business, service, and providing professional opportunities to the Latino community.

Honoree: Ediana Martinez



Ediana Martinez, whose parents were born on the beautiful Isla del Encanto, Puerto Rico and Damian Martinez who's mother was born in the gorgeous country of Ecuador and whose father comes from the World Cup Champion country of Argentina, land of wine and Messi.

Ediana Martinez, is President and Founder of Essential Senior Benefits, established during the pandemic. Ediana has spent most of her life serving others through different organizations whether it was volunteering in nursing homes with Interact Club or tutoring young children at the local Egg

Harbor Township Community Center. In March of 2009 Ediana started a nonprofit organization called "United Fighting Against Cancer" in which she and her team raised money for area children in Atlantic County who were fighting cancer and donated 100% of those funds to help offset the cost that cancer leaves a family financially.

A Stockton College graduate, Class of 2009 for Speech Pathology, she knew her heart was entrepreneurship. Winning every single award possible with AFLAC, she placed in the Top 1% in the company for multiple years. However, Ediana wanted to make a real IMPACT on her community. This is where Essential Senior Benefits was born.

Along with her husband Damian Martinez (Vice President of Essential Senior Benefits) who spent over a decade in Law Enforcement achieving various merits and commendations, took a leap of faith and with God's direction he retired from Law Enforcement and joined as a husband-and-wife team to grow their business while also serving others. They have been together for 20 years and took their home "teamwork approach" and applied it to their small business. Their biggest pride are their 3 beautiful children Sofia, Damian, and Eli.

HAAC Board Member of the Year

This individual has made significant contributions to our community through their involvement on committees, leadership, and commitment to the mission and vision of the HAAC organization.

Honoree: Luis Chevere



Luis M. Chevere was born in Puerto Rico and his parents later relocated to Philadelphia, PA, where he was raised with his 3 brothers and sister. After graduating from BOK Vocational High School in 1979, Luis relocated to Atlantic City, NJ to begin his career in the thriving casino industry, specializing in Food and Beverage Departments. It was not long before Luis worked his way up to a supervisory position, whereby he also decided to take on additional responsibilities to serve as the Shop Steward Representative, for the Local 54 Union. As Shop Steward, Luis represented fellow employees that may have had any workplace matters of concern to be voiced and resolved. Luis has immense enthusiasm for being of service and making a difference for fellow colleagues which also transcended into the community where he proudly lives and serves. Luis has not only served as President of the Parent Teacher Association of Texas Avenue School, he is also a 4th Ward Neighborhood Committee Representative, a volunteer member of the Atlantic County Red Cross, and he is a member of the Duck Town

Association for Atlantic City. Most notably, he has served as a member of the Hispanic Alliance Association (now Hispanic Association of Atlantic County) for over 20 years.

Healthcare Nuestro Pueblo Award

Awarded to a healthcare professional who embodies the characteristics of compassionate care, respects patients' values, culture, choices and decisions, and understands the significance of educating our community with regard to the latest healthcare issues.

Honorees: Christine Guzman and Vanessa Negron

Christine Guzman



Christine Guzman is the Supervisor of School Health Specialists with AtlantiCare's Healthy Schools, Healthy Children Initiative. She is a graduate of Stockton University, with a Bachelor's Degree in Literature and Language with a minor in Spanish in 1994. Christine serves various roles at AtlantiCare: ALMA Co Chair, DOH Youth Advisory Board Advisor as well as the DOH Adolescent Health Coordinator for AtlantiCare's DOH Adolescent Health Grant. In her 18 years with AtlantiCare she has found a passion in assisting the Hispanic community thru her various roles as a parent educator, RWJ Health Literacy Coordinator, Coordinator of the Hispanic Coalition of Churches and much more. Christine is the mother of 3 beautiful adult

children: Joshua, Jazzy and Juliet. Christine has a great passion in sharing community resources within her community along with the community at large. Every year Christine coordinates a migrant clothing drive with ALMA to assist our migrant children during their stay here in NJ while they attend summer school and summer camp.

Vanessa Negron



Vanessa Negron has over 8 years of experience serving the Medicaid population, including children, adults, and people with disabilities. She has remained dedicated to community service, and to improving the lives of others.

In 2020, Vanessa along with Sorida Lopez, Diane Conover, John Roy and David Vinokurov launched the Community Networking Association (CNA) of Atlantic County chapter, where she serves as Co-chair. The CNA helps ensure that social services and resources are made available to all who need them, through the power of networking.

Vanessa currently serves as a Community Development Analyst for Aetna Better Health® of New Jersey— a division of Aetna that is one of the nation's leading diversified health care benefits

companies and part of the CVS Health family. As an advocate for community development, Vanessa takes care of members who might need a little extra support by connecting them to other community resources.

Throughout 2023, Vanessa has worked in the Atlantic City community to ensure all undocumented children enroll into NJ FamilyCare through New Jersey's new Cover All Kids program. She has worked closely with the Atlantic City Board of Education as well as with El Pueblo Unidos to host several Cover All Kids events to help Latino families/children apply for health insurance.

Since coming to Atlantic County, she participates in numerous community events and meetings throughout the month and is always willing to support the community in any way she can. It has been Vanessa's greatest honor to serve the community of Atlantic County and the Hispanic Association of Atlantic County.

Public Service

Awarded to an individual in public service including government employees, elected officials, law enforcement or in military services that has made a significant contribution to our community through his/her skill, leadership or advocacy of issues that affect the Latino community within the public sector.

Honoree: NJ Latino American Troopers Society



The New Jersey Latino American Trooper Society – NJLATS is a 501c3 Nonprofit Community outreach Organization that was established in 2013. It is comprised of active, retired and civilian members of the New Jersey State Police. NJLATS is committed to building and maintaining relationships between law enforcement and Latino communities.

NJLATS conducts various bilingual community outreach programs which extend to various parts of the United States, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. NJLATS offers peer support, community based mentoring and counseling with the assistance of New Jersey State Police Chaplain, Carlos Cedeno, the first Latino Chaplain in New Jersey State Police History.

Future Leader

Awarded to an individual who has made a significant contribution to our community through scholastic achievement, leadership or exemplary accomplishments that qualifies him/her as an outstanding role model for other youth.

Honorees: Aston Ragsdale and Yuliana Tapia

Aston Ragsdale



Aston Lanét Ragsdale was born in Galloway, New Jersey. Born from her mother, Lisette Santiago and her father Mack Ragsdale, Aston was gifted a sewing machine on her 12th birthday, and from there on she started her journey as a self-taught seamstress. Once she began to study at Atlantic County Institute of Technology (ACIT) with a major in Fashion, Decoration, and Design she started to “perfect her craft”. Aston initially began her business by selling purses she created as well as selling distressed t-shirts. As she got further into her high school career, Aston began to take custom orders for dresses and other clothing. Aston is mostly inspired by the women in her family. Their ability to excel in life no matter the obstacles was always so fascinating to her. She is also inspired by her Great Grandmother, who was a seamstress as well. After graduating ACIT, Aston was able to fully focus on her business. She is now thriving as

an entrepreneur and as a sewing teacher! She’s involved with the leaders in training program at Second Baptist Church, where she teaches kids ages 14-18 how to sew. While constantly reaching new goals within her business, to sharing her knowledge of sewing with the new generation, Aston is a true inspiration to the youth and future leaders of tomorrow.

Yuliana Tapia



Yuliana Tapia, a senior at Stockton University, is a first generation Mexican American student and a Health Science major who aspires to become a Physician Assistant. She was born and raised in Atlantic City and graduated from Ocean City High school. During her high school years, Yuliana was actively engaged and her passion to volunteer in her community quickly arose as she volunteered at Shore Memorial Hospital as a transporter and translator to Spanish speaking patients. Volunteering at the hospital sparked her interest in becoming a Physician Assistant.

Yuliana is one of the founders and president of the new club at Stockton University called MEXSA: Mexican Student Association. The growing diversity of Latino students, especially Mexican students at Stockton motivated her to start MEXSA. To her, representation is everything as it builds perception and is vital for the young Latino generation. MEXSA's mission is to promote Mexican culture and encourage identity and values as Mexicans. As president of MEXSA, her aim is to create a unity between the Mexican American students and the community through volunteerism and cultural events and assist our minority students in their efforts towards becoming accustomed to a new environment through social events, information resources and networking. Knowing that she is not the only first generation Mexican American student at Stockton, her goal is to create a safe haven for students alike and create a club where they are seen and heard. Being first generation means setting an example and paving the way for future generations. Along with the MEXSA's executive board, Yuliana strives to empower the new generation of Mexican American students at Stockton University and serve as an example of resilience to the younger generation who want to pursue a higher education. She believes that Latinos especially the young generation in the South Jersey area, need to see their identities represented in spaces of higher education.

The adversities experienced by her hardworking parents have inspired Yuliana to make her own challenges. Because of the sacrifices her parents made, she is where she is today. Her parents are the reason she has always been proud of her cultural roots and embraced her Mexican values that are embedded in her heart and spirit. She will continue to volunteer in the many organizations that service the community and impoverished and distressed neighborhoods of Atlantic City. As a future healthcare provider, Yuliana intends to prioritize her involvement in the community and strives to advocate for people that are excluded from the healthcare system. Building a positive and safe community within Atlantic County will vastly improve the determinants of health and positively impacts the overall wellbeing of the residents of Atlantic County.

Nuestro Amigo/a Pueblo Award

Awarded to a non-Hispanic individual that has demonstrated devotion to the betterment of the Latino community through their work, special achievement(s) or service to the community.

Honoree: Ms. Nicole Renae Williams



Nicole Williams is an Atlantic City native who graduated from Pleasantville High School and received a Bachelor's Degree and a Master's in Education from the illustrious Howard University and a Master's of Educational Leadership from Stockton University.

Nicole entered the profession of teaching in 2005. In 2012, she became a part of the Atlantic City Public Schools family. During her tenure she has served as a teacher, literacy coach, and vice principal. Currently, Nicole is the Principal of Sovereign Avenue School where she continues to encourage, motivate, and engage teachers, students, families, and community members in the process of teaching and learning. Her favorite quote is by Malcolm X, "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today". Her goal is to empower and provide multiple learning opportunities for my students and the community she serves.

Service and scholarship are paramount to Ms. Williams and is a proud member of the Atlantic City Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Iota Chapter and a mentor for Princess, Inc. She is also member of Second Baptist Church in Atlantic City and inductee of the 2023 Atlantic County Women's Hall of Fame for Education.

Nuestro Organizational Amigo/a Pueblo Award

Awarded to an organization that has demonstrated outstanding social responsibility to the Latino community through participation and support of issues, programs, or events relating to the Latin community or that has demonstrated a commitment to the advancement of Latinos in their organization.

Honoree: South Jersey Cultural Alliance

Julie Hain



Julie Hain brings over 20 years of experience in the arts, history, and culture sector and is the current Executive Director of the South Jersey Cultural Alliance (SJCA). Recognized for her innovative and collaborative leadership style, Hain has worked to foster a more inclusive cultural community in South Jersey. Before joining SJCA, she held notable leadership positions at the Tuckerton Seaport & Baymen's Museum and the International Sculpture Center. Hain's programs, such as the South Jersey Cultural Asset Map and Arts & Culture Connectors program, prioritize community building, resource sharing, peer learning, and fostering a strong network of cultural professionals. Her focus on increasing inclusivity and accessibility for individuals of all backgrounds and abilities is transforming the South Jersey cultural community, making her a respected changemaker in the field.

Shoanne Seijas



Shoanne's journey has been shaped by a profound passion for anthropology, community service, and fostering meaningful connections. With a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology from Stockton University and a master's degree in Communication for Development and Social Change from Temple University, Shoanne brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the team. Shoanne's dedication to making a positive impact extends beyond her service, as she has always been driven by a genuine desire to help others. With a deep appreciation for art, culture, and personal connections, Shoanne is happy to work alongside SJCA and its members to foster community growth and empowerment. Shoanne's multidimensional background and genuine enthusiasm make her a powerful force for change. Her ability to connect with people on a personal level, coupled with her strong communication skills, positions her to make a lasting impact. As she continues her journey of social change and community engagement, Shoanne's compassion, dedication, and expertise will undoubtedly leave a strong impact on the lives of individuals and the broader community.

STEM Nuestro Pueblo Award

Awarded to an individual in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering, and/or Mathematics who has made significant contributions through the advancement of their work, leadership, or in advocating opportunities for advancement of Latinos in STEM.

Honoree: Dr. Adaliz Rivera



Adaliz Rivera, M.D, has been serving the community as a medical doctor for over 18 years. From 2008 to 2018, she served as Assistant Professor of Medicine at the Cooper Medical School of Rowan University and served AtlantiCare team of Primary Care Providers, Pediatrics, and OB Medical Clinic from 2018 to 2022. Currently, Dr. Rivera joined United Here Health - Mount Sinai as the Population Health Director.

Her clinical interests include adult and pediatric medicine, integrative medicine, and women's healthcare across the lifespan. Her practice also includes postpartum care, the treatment of acute and chronic illnesses, disease prevention, and pain control using conventional and alternative methods. Dr. Rivera earned her medical degree from the University of Medicine and Dentistry

of New Jersey (Robert Wood Johnson Medical School) in Camden, New Jersey, in 2005. She completed her residency in Family Medicine at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia. Dr. Rivera also has completed specialized training in homeopathic medicine through the Center for Education and Development of Clinical Homeopathy in Philadelphia, and in acupuncture through the Academy of Pain Research in San Francisco. Dr. Rivera is nationally board certified by the American Board of Family Medicine and is a member of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Dr. Rivera was a guest speaker for Prematurity Prevention Initiative and NAACP Black Infant and Maternal Mortality Task Force for Postpartum Concerns. She was named to South Jersey Magazine's lists of Top Female Doctors and Top Kids Doctors for 2015, 2018, 2019 and 2020.