



Latino Leadership Development Program graduates Raquel Serrano, left, and Lisette Castro share a moment during the program's luncheon on Thursday. MARIE DE JESUS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Future community leaders get chance to hone skills

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Staff writer

As a program administrator at East High School, Maycanitza Perez, 33, is always telling teachers and students under her supervision that learning is a lifelong process.

But Perez doesn't just talk the talk. She walks the walk.

On Thursday, the 1995 graduate of East was among 27 graduates of the United Way of Rochester's 2011 Latino Leadership Development Program (LLDP) honored at a commencement luncheon held at Mario's Italian Steakhouse on Monroe Avenue.

Honored with the Circulo Latino Community Leadership Award was Leo Dondiz, 42, of Xerox, who has been a volunteer with the Red Cross Next Generation Leaders Program for 19 years.

"It was an amazing experi-



Leo Dondiz, right, receives the 2011 Circulo Latino Community Leadership Award on Thursday from Fernan Cepero, chair of Circulo Latino, one of United Way's Leadership Giving Societies.

MARIE DE JESUS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

ence," Perez said. "You get to network with other leaders in the community while enhancing your own leadership skills. In my role as an educator and instructional leader in my school building, I get to go back and use those skills to help develop both my teachers and my students."

LLDP identifies, trains and promotes the placement of La-

tinios in policy-making positions and has been giving area Latinos the opportunity to enhance their professional and personal skills as business and community leaders for more than 20 years.

The graduates, mostly young professionals, spent six full days in August in classes covering

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topics such as communication, decision making, conflict resolution and board membership responsibilities.

In her job, Perez oversees student discipline and instructional programming for subjects like languages and music/art. She said the Rochester School District and her building supervisors are very supportive of programs that help her develop professionally.

"Going through a program like this is great because I'm a role model and my dream is to further develop my students to become leaders in the community," she said.

In his opening remarks, LLDP steering committee chairman Julio Saenz of The Housing Council made it a point to thank the many corporate businesses and nonprofit groups that gave employees the time and resources to participate.

Those businesses and organizations also provided the program's mentors.

Saenz recalled that when he went through the program, his employer at the time "didn't get it," and he wound up using vacation time to participate.

"I can speak from the heart and really tell you

United Way of Greater Rochester's Latino Leadership Development Program Class of 2011

Carmen Albert, Harter Secrest & Emery; Lisette Castro, AIDS Care; Lillian Colón, Edgar Colón, Angie Santiago, Ibero-American Action League; Maritza Cubi, The Advocacy Center; Fernando DeJesus, East House Corp.; Marisol Galarza-Ruiz, Monroe Community College; Janet Gomez, Ivelisse Santiago, Raquel Serrano, city of Rochester; Daniel Lopez, Eduardo Pabon, Time Warner Cable; Maycanitza Perez, Rochester School District; Luz Ramirez, Verizon Wireless; Jeannette Ramos-Laza, Edwin Rosa Jr., Merari Rowley-Pacheco, Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection; Berta Rivera, CASH Coalition/Empire Justice; Margarita Rivera-Gonzalez, AIDS Care; Yversha Román, The Center for Youth Services; Nelida Torres, PathStone Corp.; Angie Torres, Monroe Plan for Medical Care; Jessica Valle, Planned Parenthood; Blanca Vallone, ESL Federal Credit Union; Peterson Vazquez, Internal Revenue Service; Miguel Velazquez, RGRTA.

Circulo Latino Community Leadership Award winner: Leo Dondiz, Xerox.

what a great program it is and what a great investment you've made in your employee," Saenz said. "This year's LLDP class represents 27 of our community's future leaders. I know they are ready to take on the challenge of making a difference."

Luis Rivera, associate director of human resources for Verizon Wireless, the luncheon's sponsor, thanked the LLDP's many mentors who took the time "to provide insight, pearls of wisdom and perspective."

"When I think of leadership I think immediately of the ability to influence

change. That's the opportunity we all have ahead of us," Rivera said.

In his volunteer work with the Red Cross over two decades, Dondiz has enabled a lot of positive change for city high schoolers.

"It's a program focused on helping them better themselves, become self-confident, to stay in school and take control of their lives," Dondiz said of the Next Generation Leaders Program. "I'm just blessed and honored that I'm here and I wish everyone who is part of this could come up with me." □

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