



ASPIRATIONS

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WNBC 4, WJTV Telemundo 47 Award Grant to ASPIRA

The NBC and Telemundo New York television stations, WNBC 4 and WJTV Telemundo 47, awarded a \$75,000 grant to ASPIRA of New York to continue the youth services agency's Voluntary Initiative Program (VIP), through which NBC/Universal employees serve as mentors and tutors to "Aspirantes," as ASPIRA youth are known.



The grant also supports career counseling, college test preparation and digital literacy development. ASPIRA was selected for the award based on the impact its programs have in improving educational opportunities for students in grades six through 12.

"On behalf of the young people we serve, I want to thank WNBC 4 and WJTV Telemundo 47 for their generous support," said Hector Gesualdo, executive director of ASPIRA of New York. "Your commitment to Latino youth provides invaluable exposure to the world of work, the expectations of the workplace and the myriad career opportunities our young people can pursue."



Speaker Silver Sponsors ASPIRA Leadership Club in 'Loisaida'



An Aspirante presents a token of appreciation to Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver.

ASPIRA of New York announced the launch of a leadership development program for young people on the Lower East Side of Manhattan made possible by a grant from Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver.

The newly formed ASPIRA club will draw youth from high schools on the Lower East Side, as well as community-based partner organizations Vision Urbana, Inc. and Loisaida, Inc. The club will begin meeting this fall in space provided by Loisaida, Inc.

At a press conference at the Seward Park Extension Community Center to announce the creation of the new club, Speaker Silver was joined by ASPIRA alumnus Fernando Ferrer, the former Bronx borough president and Democratic mayoral nominee.

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Hot Fun in the Summertime

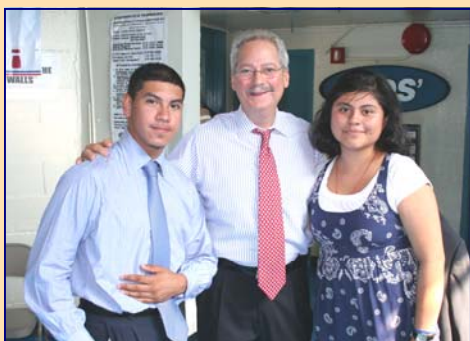
ASPIRA and the United Federation of Teachers, in collaboration with the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, held “A Sunset Family Event” Labor Day weekend at P.S. 325 in Harlem. The day featured a production of the comedy *Los Jibaros Progresistas*, by Ramon Mendez Quinones, as well games, music, food and face painting.

Earth Day Tree Planting in East Harlem

ASPIRA gladly accepted NBC Universal’s invitation to join forces on Earth Day to plant trees at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Housing Campus in East Harlem. The Manhattan neighborhood has the city’s highest rate of adolescent asthma and lowest tree canopy. The joint effort was part of the city’s MillionTreesNYC initiative, the goal of which is to plant one million trees throughout the five boroughs by 2017.



New ASPIRA Club in ‘Loisaida’



Former ASPIRA Clubs Federation Chairperson Fernando Ferrer, center, flanked by Elisier Rivera and Nancy Trujillo, the current and last year’s ACF chairs, respectively.

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“I am proud to have been able to support ASPIRA’s efforts to establish a program that will help so many young Latinos pursue and achieve their lifelong goals and become the leaders of tomorrow,” said Silver. “The time, money and energy we invest today will go a long way toward ensuring that our children have the tools they need to succeed in this ever-growing, global economy. It is a wise investment that will create a brighter future for our youth and a better tomorrow for our city, state and nation. I applaud ASPIRA for successfully opening the doors of opportunity for countless Aspirantes since 1961. Working together, there is nothing we cannot achieve.”

“It’s heartening to see the ASPIRA spirit alive and well and thriving,” Ferrer said. “I always look back fondly on my days

in ASPIRA and will always be grateful for what being an Aspirante helped me achieve professionally and how it helped me grow personally. I want to extend my warmest and sincerest thanks to Speaker Silver for his commitment to our young people.”

“One of the solutions to the Latino dropout crisis is ASPIRA,” said Hector Gesualdo, executive director of ASPIRA. “The more young people we reach, the more Latinos that will graduate high school and go on to college. Speaker Silver understands that and is affording us an opportunity to work with young Latinos on the Lower East Side. Thank you Speaker Silver, and thank you Loisaida, Inc. and Vision Urbana for partnering with us in this important endeavor.”

ASPIRA Honors CUNY'S Hershenson, ALPFA and Latino Achievers at Annual Awards Luncheon

ASPIRA honored the City University of New York's senior vice chancellor for university relations and secretary to its board of trustees, Jay Hershenson, as well as the Association of Latino Professionals in Finance and Accounting (ALPFA), at its annual awards luncheon at The Pierre in Manhattan.

Hershenson and ALPFA Chief Executive Officer Manny Espinoza were presented with Dr. Antonia Pantoja Leadership Awards, named for ASPIRA's founder. ASPIRA also recognized the contributions to the city's Latino community of Deputy Mayor Carol Robles-Roman and City Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito, among other honorees, at its Ninth Annual Circle of Latino Achievers Luncheon.



Jay Hershenson of CUNY

In addition, 41 college-bound Aspirantes, as ASPIRA youth are known, were awarded \$1,000 scholarships donated by corporate sponsors. WNBC-TV reporter Monica Morales and WNJU-TV news anchor Ramon Zayas served as luncheon hosts.

"ASPIRA's founder, Dr. Antonia Pantoja, stressed the importance of education and articulated through the agency's name the aspirations of Latino youth to succeed, contribute and lead," said Magda N. Yrizarry, chair of ASPIRA's board of directors. "For their generous, selfless commitment to Dr. Pantoja's goals for our young people, it is with great pride that we present our leadership awards to Jay Hershenson and ALPFA."

"The extraordinary work of ASPIRA is indispensable to the future of our city—helping young people everywhere realize their dreams through higher education," said Hershenson. "I am deeply honored to be counted as a strong supporter of Aspirantes."

In recognition of their professional achievements and community service, Circle of Latino Achiever Awards were presented to the following:

- ◆ Deputy Mayor Carol Robles-Roman, CUNY Trustee
- ◆ NYC Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito
- ◆ Yolanda Askew, WNBC
- ◆ Rita DiMartino, CUNY Trustee
- ◆ Nelson Gomez, Con Edison
- ◆ Valerie Leeder, Goldman Sachs
- ◆ Crecensio Morales, Long Beach High School
- ◆ Dr. Hugo M. Morales, CUNY Trustee
- ◆ Lupita Reyes, Verizon
- ◆ Beneranda Rivera-Baez, Telemundo 47
- ◆ Salvador Padron-Gomez, Citibank
- ◆ Helen Rosado, The Bank of New York Mellon
- ◆ Diana Sabogal, PricewaterhouseCoopers
- ◆ Mercedes Saint, Community Leader



ASPIRA Chairwoman Magda Yrizarry presents Latino Achiever Award to Diana Sabogal. Aspirante and college scholarship award winner Julissa Hidalgo looks on.

The 41 scholarships awarded at the luncheon to college-bound Aspirantes were donated by Verizon, which sponsored 17; Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, who contributed nine on behalf of CUNY; Con Edison and Goldman Sachs, which sponsored five each; Colgate-Palmolive, which donated two; and Hunter College, Citibank and ALPFA, which each donated one.

ASPIRA Program Focuses on Middle School Students

Study after study and decades of analysis have time and again singled out the middle school grades as the weak link in the New York City public school system.

Twenty years ago, the city Board of Education, in a 95-page report, concluded that sweeping changes were needed to address the ills of its middle schools. Last year, a coalition of community groups decried that the sixth through eighth grades too often become “pathways to failure,” the causes of their concern documented by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.



A beaming Larry Bentié, ASPIRA's program director at the Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists, keeps his middle school charges busy and happy after school.

In the intervening years, grade-by-grade testing has shown that reading scores plunge from the fifth to the sixth grade, when most students move to middle school, and continue to decline through the eighth grade. This troubling pattern, the *New York Times* reported, “is increasingly seen as a critical impediment to tackling early high school dropout rates as well as the achievement gap separating black and white students.”

“The consequences of dropping out are life changing.” — Hispanic Federation

It is Hispanic students, however, who are perhaps most affected by the dysfunction of the city's middle schools, where teachers are less experienced than their elementary and high school counterparts and more likely to teach outside their license area.

New York City Department of Education data show that Hispanic students have the lowest graduation rate and highest dropout rate of any group. In the Class of 2003, the most recent cohort tracked by the

Department for seven years, nearly 40 percent of Latinos dropped out of school.

And as the Hispanic Federation points out, “The consequences of dropping out are life-changing. New York City dropouts have a 1 in 3 chance of living in poverty.”

In an effort to reach young Latinos at a time when many begin to slip in school, ASPIRA in 2004 launched a gender-specific club program for low-income middle school students. The program for girls is CHOICE—Creating Heroines of Independent Creative Expression; the program for boys is TRIBE—Truth and Responsibility In Boys' Empowerment.

Discussions in mixed groups of 11- to 14-year-olds about dating, sex, pregnancy, gangs, smoking and drug and alcohol use too often result in posturing by the boys and silence from the girls. Early adolescence is a period when support from same-gender peers, the ability to discuss sensitive issues in a safe environment and same-gender role models are particularly important and can mean the difference between youngsters choosing a healthy and safe lifestyle, or giving in to peer pressure and participating in harmful behaviors.



Congratulations...

Betty Gonzalez-Soto, principal of P.S. 211, was honored as the Educator of the Year during Bronx Puerto Rican Day Parade festivities in May. P.S. 211, located in the Bronx, is home to one of ASPIRA's 21st Century Community Learning programs.

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