

Latina woman honored for nonprofit work

Sruthi Gottipati • Staff writer • October 8, 2010

The Latino community in Rochester had much to celebrate on Thursday when a woman was honored for decades of community service and students graduated from a leadership program at a luncheon at Mario's Via Abruzzi restaurant in Brighton.

Luisa Baars, 73, of Irondequoit received the Circulo Latino award from United Way of Greater Rochester for her work on the boards of several nonprofits including Mary Cariola Children's Center, Catholic Family Center and Irondequoit Rotary.

"I feel honored and humbled," Baars, president of the MAS Translation Services, said at the ceremony. "There are countless Latinos doing many good things in the community in daily life."

Baars, who came from Puerto Rico about 30 years ago, said her modest childhood and her mother's influence shaped the person she became. "For me, it feels natural to share," she said.

The ceremony also included 22 local professionals graduating from the Latino Leadership Development Program organized by United Way of Greater Rochester. The annual program, about two weeks long, started in 1983 and trains Latinos for leadership roles where they are most needed, according to Andrea Holland, United Way of Greater Rochester spokesperson.

"It took my awareness of the community to a whole other level," said Albert Algarin, 27, of Rochester. Algarin is the third member of his family to attend the program, spanning three generations. He now plans to start a nonprofit to raise funds for Latino students to go to college. "People in my age bracket can relate to these kids," he said.

"One of the biggest problems is the drop-out rate of Latino students," said Baars, who started a Rotary club to focus on Latinos and literacy.

"Rochester needs people including Latino time and talent to make it a better," said Holland, adding that

Thursday's ceremony, with more than 100 attendees, was an opportunity for Latinos to meet and discuss how they can bring about positive change in Rochester.

Baars's advice to youths? "Set high expectations for yourself. Seek the counsel of other Latinos active and productive in the community."

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