



Recognition • Education • Achievement • Community Health

SINA 11th Annual REACH Awards Ceremony

Thursday, June 1, 2017

5:00pm - 8:00pm

Trinity College
Washington Room in Mather Hall
300 Summit Street, Hartford, CT 06106





Program

Masters of Ceremonies

Steve Balcanoff
Manager, Non-Medical Services
Connecticut Children's Medical Center

Katherine Ramirez
Associate Program Specialist
Connecticut Children's Medical Center



Welcome

Jane Baird
SINA Board Chair
Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance

Melvyn Colón
Executive Director
Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance

Karla Spurlock-Evans
Dean of Multicultural Affairs, Senior Diversity Officer
Trinity College



Awards Presentation

SINA Student Support Scholarship
Presented By: Joseph Barber, Roberta Mills, and Katherine Ramirez



Dinner



SINA / Ivan A. Backer Scholarship
Presented By: Steve Balcanoff, Ariel Pino and Linda Valentin

Neighborhood Service Award
Presented By: Anthony Cherolis, Nilda Fernandez, and Wildaliz Bermudez

Institutional Award
Presented By: Chanel Erasmus



Closing Remarks

Melvyn Colón





Ivan A. Backer Scholarship

The SINA / Ivan A. Backer Scholarship program was established in 1997 in honor of Ivan Backer, who served as president of SINA for nearly 20 years and who was one of the driving forces behind the revival of Hartford's Southside neighborhood. The recipients are selected based on service to community, school, family, and academic achievement. The scholarship consists of three awards of \$4,000 (\$1,000 per year for 4 years) to Bulkeley High School seniors continuing their education at an accredited 4-year postsecondary program.

Destiny Alize Gonzalez



"I have decided to be a child psychologist working with children of special needs and unfortunate backgrounds...Dreams are not handed to you they are obtained by the chase and I want the children to chase their dream as I am trying to do mine." Destiny plans to attend the Central Connecticut State University.

Toi Alexis Jackson



"I feel that the true meaning of community service is helping others without looking for anything in return." Toi plans to attend the University of Connecticut Storrs campus.

Lorena Minja



"Volunteering gives you an opportunity to change people's lives, including your own. It gives you the pleasure to be the happiness in somebody's life, helping someone who may not be able to help him/herself." Lorena plans to attend the University of Connecticut Hartford Campus.





SINA Student Support Scholarship

The SINA Student Support Scholarship program was established in 2012. The purpose of the program is to provide much needed financial support to students who are attending Capital Community College (CCC). One to four scholarships in the combined amount of \$2,000 per year will be awarded annually to students on a full or part time basis, who reside in the 06106 or 06114 zip codes, and who have completed at least one semester of study.



Alvana Abedini

Alvana Abedini moved to the United States in October 2014 from Albania. During her life in Albania she had the opportunity to study at the Electrical Engineering University for two years. Unfortunately, those credits did not transfer with her during her move to America. Being 18 years old and the only member of the family to speak English, her parents relied

heavily on her for financial assistance. Working three jobs and struggling to understand her customers, Alvana decided it was time to start school again. *“My goals were to finish as soon as I could and with good grades so I could be able to start my major which I want to be in science. I am good at math and that’s what I love doing my whole life.”*

Alvana is currently working at Hartford Hospital as a phlebotomist, and at Capital Community College (CCC) as a Financial Aid Student Assistant; at the same time attending CCC to pursue a career in science/mathematics. *“It hasn’t been easy for us, for me, but I am still fighting for my dreams. I want to finish college so I could have the chance to work in the field of my degree....Thank you for giving me the opportunity to achieve my goals towards education.”*



Shantel Cameron

Shantel Cameron is a student at Capital Community College, enrolled in the nursing courses with the plan to become a mid-wife. She is a mother to three children she believes are the most valuable inspirations in her life. *“They keep me motivated during difficult financial times and I am determined to receive a good education so I can support them and provide them with more than I have ever had. I am the only child from my*

family to have finished high school and attend college, and I know the challenges of pioneering that journey alone. However, starting over in the U.S. means more than just a social and cultural adjustment for my family. It means my academic accomplishments from Jamaica do not carry over; it means that I must further my education on American soil to get a job that will support my family. While I am dedicated to the dream, it is a difficult dream to achieve. I am willing, excited and driven to learn, but finances are a harsh reality.... I am very grateful for the opportunities like the one your fund is providing to students. It reminds me that I am not alone on this journey to accomplish my educational goals”





Allyiah Guiont

Allyiah Guiont found her academic home at Capital Community College (CCC). *“Coming to college again was a decision I made to give myself a better life. I realize that in order for me to be successful I had to take care of things on my own.”* Allyiah is presently working as a Nursing Assistant and her passion for the medical field has grown. She is currently attending CCC in hopes to enter their Nursing program. *“This scholarship could help me afford classes, books, and possibly other items necessary for my education. Educating oneself should be the goal of everyone yet many give up once things get difficult. I am not one of these people.... I could fear the possibility of failure but rather I hope for success and it is that hope that keeps me going.”*





Valerie Zayas

Valerie Zayas was born and raised in Hartford, CT. She became a mother at the age of 16 and had to place her education on a back-burner. Eventually, Valerie was able to return to school and earn her high school diploma at Hartford Adult Education. *“Once I earned my high school diploma I enrolled in Capital Community College majoring in Criminal Justice Associate degree program in Science. I’m a single mother of 2 beautiful girls who inspire me through my schooling, and help me stay positive throughout my life. I am a role model to both of them. I always tell my children, becoming who you want to be takes a lot of work and schooling, but to always remember that you will always make it to your career if you just believe in yourself. Always follow your heart and don’t let anything bring you down.”* Valerie looks forward to pursuing a career in forensic scientist. *“I am proud to say that if I get the chance to make it into law enforcement I will be a great employee as well as a great Hispanic role model for the community.... I know I can help my hometown and I am looking forward to it.”*





Neighborhood Service Awards

The Neighborhood Service Awards recognize individuals in the community who have made outstanding contributions to Hartford neighborhoods.

Christopher Brown



Some people walk the talk, but Chris Brown does more – or, more accurately, he rides the talk. A passionate bicyclist who puts his beliefs to work every day, Chris rides nearly everywhere, reducing his carbon footprint and providing a role model for the neighborhood. His motivation is very practical

because, as Chris says, “a bike is more affordable and usually faster” than a car.

Since “not everyone is lucky enough to get a job close by,” Chris feels fortunate to work at two places within a mile of his home – as a studio arts technician at Trinity and as a shop manager at BiCi Co. The latter is a program of the Center for Latino Progress, where he helps young Hartford residents learn about bike safety, maintenance and repair. Young people completing the course earn a bike of their own.



Chris is a passionate advocate for the community, appearing regularly at hearings and city council meetings to promote the creation of bike lanes and the inclusion of bicycle stands in construction projects. A native New Yorker, raised in northern New Jersey, Chris finds it easy to get the rhythm of – and quickly pass – busy traffic while bicycling.

His desire to “not let the neighborhood get treated poorly” motivated him to serve for many years on the board of the Frog Hollow NRZ (neighborhood revitalization zone.) Chris was a leader in the fight to prevent the closure of Flower Street and he regularly argues for preserving older buildings and maintaining the fabric of the neighborhood. Chris has long fought for the restoration of the local library branch, believing “there are a lot of good people in the neighborhood and they deserve better than what they get.”

“Chris contributes to the vibrancy of the neighborhood. He belongs to the breed of people who make communities lively, interesting places.”

- Melvyn Colon

Melvyn Colon, Executive Director of SINA, met Chris through the NRZ and through Trinity,

in a class on community development strategies. He describes him as a very engaged community member. “You never know where or when he will turn up,” says Melvyn. “Chris contributes to the vibrancy of the neighborhood. He belongs to the breed of people who make communities lively, interesting places.”

Cora Mercer



After nearly 20 years at Hartford Neighborhood Centers (HNC), starting as an administrative assistant and ultimately becoming Executive Director, Cora Mercer is still passionate about its work. “This is something I must do,” she says. “I have intimate knowledge of why the services of HNC are so important. But for the grace of God and HNC, there go I.”

This feeling drives her commitment and longevity at HNC, where she arrives very early to avoid traffic on her hour-long commute. In addition to managing early childhood programs, Cora administers a food bank that helps feed over 150 families. She also coordinates summer camp sessions for youth at Camp Hi Hoti, in Hebron, CT, and handles facilities management there.

Cora makes it a personal mission to ensure care is not interrupted for the 300 children served from the Frog Hollow neighborhood. HNC board member Nilda Fernandez says “She has been a pillar in the organization since the



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There have even been periods when she donated her time to save costs and ensure families received needed services, but she has never given up on the agency.”

Other board members praised Cora’s “tremendous insight in improving HNC’s financial systems, budget preparation, monitoring and execution” and her dedication in driving nearly 100 miles daily to her job at HNC. Cora responds “it wouldn’t be possible without board members who understand the needs of the community. Some have been with HNC as long as I have.”

Cora fought to make sure families have access to food through an on-site food pantry. She provides free, high quality, early childhood education services. The elderly have computer classes at HNC, and neighborhood youth have access to free enrichment activities at Camp Hi Hoti in Hebron, CT. Cora’s sincere and selfless commitment ensures that Hartford Neighborhood Center is a safe haven for the diverse children and families of Frog Hollow.



Joshua Michtom



That joyful noise you hear is quite possibly Josh Michtom and the Hartford Hot Several, our first and only city-wide brass band. While holding down a full time job as a Public Defender for the State of Connecticut, Josh founded and grew the band. A native of Brooklyn, New York, Josh worked for a hotel union in New York and

attended law school with the intention of helping people. In recent years, he returned to his love of music to help bring people together.

While originally a bass player, Josh hadn't played much since high school. An evening with friends playing New Orleans-style music turned into the idea for a band. They play at community events, march in the Puerto Rican parade and perform in schools, encouraging students to learn to read and play music. "Since I can't march with a bass, I taught myself trombone," says Josh.



According to Hartford City Councilwoman Wildaliz Bermudez, who met Josh through her attorney husband and their shared love of music and art, “Josh recognizes the arts as a way to bring people together and transform a space” whether by creating Mardi Gras celebrations, or inventing neighborhood gathering spaces with seating and books under bridges and overpasses, as he did last summer. “He is remarkable because he takes ideas and turns them into reality.”

“Josh recognizes the arts as a way to bring people together and transform a space.”

- Wildaliz Bermudez

The effort Josh expends to help children through music amplifies his work

as a public defender. “He has helped countless young people, including the famous cases of Jane Doe and Cassandra C. He is a bona fide genius,” says Wildaliz.

Josh sees it more simply, explaining that “I have some limited array of skills and want to put them to use for people who need them, to help the community. I had the good fortune to become a lawyer, I can speak Spanish, and I also do art, which I donate to various causes.” As Wildaliz summarizes, “he is a humble guy, a force of nature, and an amazing human being with a giving heart.”





Trinity College Institutional Award

Each year SINA gives out an Institutional Award that recognizes and honors an employee from one of our three institutions. This individual goes beyond the call of duty and contributes significantly to the betterment of the Hartford neighborhoods.

Dr. Alison Draper

Dr. Alison Draper, the recipient of the Trinity Institutional Award, is the Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Science and a Lecturer in Environmental Science at the college. She also helps create successful science events and serves as an advisor. Alison explains she is “always looking for ways to

communicate about science, to make it real, providing experience for students and benefits for others as well.”

Consuelo Pedro, Trinity class of 2015 and a staff member in the Dean of Student’s Office, says “Alison Draper is Trinity College’s best kept secret, redefining the concept of advisor. She gives her undivided attention. Alison works with you to find your path, teaching you to analyze and learn from your stumbles. She helps you discover strengths you did not even know that you had.”

Alison’s regular responsibilities range across the college’s science division, covering natural and physical science, math and engineering. She obtains grants and coordinates a peer-



led study program for introductory science courses. She manages an annual research symposium and the honors-like Interdisciplinary Science Program.

“Alison Draper is Trinity College’s best kept secret, redefining the concept of advisor. ... She helps you discover strengths you did not even know that you had.”

- Consuelo Pedro

When Trinity hosts the Connecticut Tech Savvy event, to teach young women about STEM

careers, Alison coordinates it. She runs a summer program for incoming 10th graders, in collaboration with the Hartford Public Schools, which simultaneously trains Trinity students to teach science. Alison hosts public school group when they visit the campus, introducing them to the college’s science facilities. Consuela says “she weaves STEM classes and the Interdisciplinary Science program together with civic engagement, serving on committees where she pushes to incorporate social justice and Hartford engagement into the curriculum.”

The spark for Alison’s approach came early in her career, when she was teaching environmental chemistry and wanted her students to get real world experience. A community group contacted her with a concern about carcinogens and she turned that investigation into a class project. Alison says “My students took their work more seriously, once they saw it had real world implications. So I kept looking for these opportunities.” Hartford’s residents and Trinity’s students are fortunate to have a scientist of Alison’s caliber applying her win-win philosophy here.





REACH Committee

Steve Balcanoff

Chairperson

and SINA Board Member

Connecticut Children's Medical Center

Joe Barber

Trinity College

Nilda Fernandez

UConn Health / Connecticut Children's Medical Center

Ariel Pino

Hartford Hospital

Katherine Ramirez

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Julia Rivera

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Luis A. Rivera

Subcommittee Member

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Adrian Texidor

Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance

Amneris Torres

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Linda Valentin

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Adrian Texidor
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**Executive Committee Member*



**REACH is sponsored by SINA
and its member institutions:
Trinity College,
Connecticut Children's Medical Center,
and Hartford Hospital**

The REACH Committee's mission is to develop, support
and recognize individuals who positively contribute to
the growth of the Hartford Community.



**SOUTHSIDE INSTITUTIONS
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