



HARTFORD  
HOSPITAL



Trinity College  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

**Recognition • Education • Achievement • Community Health**

*SINA's 4th Annual  
REACH Awards Ceremony*

Thursday, June 3, 2010

The Lyceum  
Hartford, CT



# Program

## **Master of Ceremony**

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



## **Greetings from Host Institution**

Theresa Hendricksen  
*Senior Vice President, Clinical Services and Chief Nursing Officer*  
Connecticut Children's Medical Center



## **Greetings from SINA**

Luis C. Cabán  
*Executive Director*  
Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance



## ***Dinner***

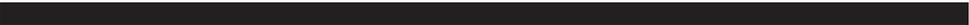


## **Awards Presentation**

Neighborhood Service Awards  
Institutional Presentation  
Ivan A. Backer Scholarship



## ***Closing Remarks***





## 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 the community, school and family; as well as for 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.

### Ivan A. Backer 2010 Scholarship Recipients



#### Saida Cooke

*"It means a lot to me, to be acknowledged for what I do in my community and winning the scholarship just made it better."*

Saida plans to attend University of Connecticut to pursue a career as a pharmacist.



#### Sefedin Begic

*"Winning the Ivan Backer Scholarship provides me with the opportunity to grow as a person as well as pursue my real goal and receive my degree."*

Sefedin plans to attend University of Hartford to obtain a degree in Business/Education.



#### Ceilena Ann Gurahoo

*"Winning the Ivan Backer Scholarship brought me one step closer towards achieving my dream."*

Ceilena plans to attend Saint Joseph College to pursue a career as a pharmacist.



## Neighborhood Service Awards Program

The Neighborhood Service Awards recognizes individuals in the community and from SINA Institutions that go beyond the call of duty to promote community service in Hartford.

### Sylvia Garcia



When Sylvia Garcia injured her back and couldn't go to work, she could have stayed home to recuperate. But then her son Calvin, a six-year-old kindergarten student at McDonough School, was trampled during a fight in the school cafeteria.

“When I went in to complain about what had happened to Calvin, they told me there was a lack of staff to supervise the kids during lunch,” said Sylvia. “I decided complaining wasn't enough – I wanted to be part of the solution. So I signed up for cafeteria duty.”

Before the start of the school year, Sylvia had already volunteered to lead Hartford's first Walking School Bus. Luis A. Rivera, Program Coordinator at CCMC's Injury Prevention Center and the person who nominated Sylvia for the SINA Neighborhood Service Award, explained. “Most of the school day injuries that happen to kids take place when they are walking to school or home from school. This can either be from getting hit by a car, or as a result of bullying. The Walking School Bus is the most effective way we have found to prevent these injuries.”

The program was the brainchild of the Safe Routes to School Committee of the Hartford Board of Education. Luis sits on the committee representing CCMC.

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Sylvia leads the walk wearing a bright yellow vest. Eight McDonough students follow in single file, holding on to a bright yellow rope. Six of the students are Sylvia's neighbors, and the other two are picked up on the way to school. Sylvia's 14-year-old son Ilya, who takes the bus from McDonough to Two Rivers Magnet School in East Hartford, brings up the rear.

"I help other kids cross, even if they are not part of my line," said Sylvia. "I help stop fights and make sure everyone within my sight is safe." After parking the "bus" at the school's front door, Sylvia goes to the cafeteria where she helps to monitor the breakfast program.

*"I decided complaining wasn't enough – I wanted to be part of the solution."*

Although three other McDonough Walking School Bus routes were

started at the same time as Sylvia's, hers is the only one still in operation. Luis said he hopes to spread her success to other schools next fall. "Sylvia is one of those really friendly, really outgoing people who has the drive to make something she believes in work. Her type of spirit is great for the school and great for the community. Now our challenge is to find other people like her at other schools so we can spread the Walking School Bus. We know it works and we know it is keeping kids safer."

Next, Sylvia decided to get involved with the school PTO. In October of 2009 she was elected PTO President, a position she will hold through the end of the school year. "We did a fund raiser called Pennies for Haiti Drive," said Sylvia. "We had a great Valentine's Day party, and we have some special events planned for the end of the school year."

Sylvia also volunteers in the front office, helping to sign in kids who are late for school. She runs the school store, selling school supplies and other items that the students buy with tickets they earn for doing their homework and good classroom behavior.

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Sylvia said the staff at McDonough has made her feel welcome. “Our new Principal, Mrs. Erickson, is awesome. She has created a totally different feeling in the building. For me it is a real pleasure to help out at McDonough, especially since I know it makes things better for my son.”

As she completes her recovery and prepares to return to work, Sylvia said she plans to stay involved at McDonough. “Obviously, I won’t have the time to do as much as I’ve done this year, but I’m committed to doing as much as I can. All the kids know me as someone who is always watching, and an extra pair of eyes can really make a difference at an elementary school.”



### *Evelyn Figueroa-Lewis*

A resident of the Sheldon/Charter Oak neighborhood since 1996, Evelyn Figueroa-Lewis has always stood out as a concerned and involved person. “When I first moved to Lisbon Street, I took it on myself to watch out for the kids when they played outside, and I got to know a lot of families,” she said. “My own kids were still in high school and elementary school, and all of us who were parents wanted to make the community safer for our kids.”

Evelyn also volunteered for CSS/CON (Coalition to Strengthen the Sheldon/Charter Oak Neighborhood). In December of 2001, she met the community group’s newly-hired Executive Director, Carol Coburn. “I quickly recognized Evelyn as the person who could give me entree not just to one segment of the community, but to the entire community,” said Carol. “It wasn’t just that she knew so many people. It was that she knew people from all of the groups that make up the community, and that her concern was for the community as a whole.”

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In May of 2002, Carol secured a grant that allowed her to hire a community organizer. Her first pick? Evelyn.

“There were people who wanted to pit one part of the community against another – Dutch Point against Charter Oak Place, Smith Towers against the office buildings,” said Evelyn. “I didn’t see it that way. I thought the whole community could be improved in ways that would be good for everyone. Don’t you think I was right?” she asked as she pointed out her surroundings on a beautiful spring afternoon in front of her apartment at the Sheldon Oak housing development. “It was always my dream to live in a place with grass and flowers and trees. Now I can sit at my front door and see all of that. Isn’t it pretty?”

The time that Evelyn was hired was a particularly critical one for Sheldon/Charter Oak. The Hartford Housing Authority had already bulldozed and rebuilt the other large housing projects in the city. Now it was Dutch Point’s turn.

***“I think the idea is to keep believing that change is coming and then work to make it change for the better.”***

“I’m not saying that Dutch Point wouldn’t have been replaced without Evelyn,” said Carol. “What I’m saying is that it wouldn’t have been done in a way that was so beneficial for all segments of the Sheldon/Charter Oak community. It was Evelyn who allowed all of the voices to be heard, which created a redevelopment that benefited everyone.”

Securing a Hope VI federal grant was a key part of this process spearheaded by Evelyn and Carol’s efforts. Another grant was secured, allowing Carol to hire four other community organizers and promoting Evelyn to Lead Community Organizer. The bulk of demolition and construction was completed between 2003 and 2008.

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But Evelyn's community-building efforts were not confined to redevelopment alone. "I think a lot of what we accomplished was helping people with their family problems," said Evelyn. "For some it was housing, or social problems. For others it was alcoholism or drug addiction. We wanted everyone to know they could call us at home, or stop by and visit, and that we would try to help no matter when they needed the help."

Evelyn's husband, Francis Lewis, also contributed. "I think over all those years, Frank was one of the few men to get involved, and the only man who stayed involved," said Carol. "He would drive the kids to field trips, bring toys to Christmas parties, work with the boys in the neighborhood. It was great for the kids to have a positive male role model."

Frank died from cancer in October of 2009. "He was a silent hero and my support system. He helped inspire the kids. There's a group of them in college right now, at least five that I know of, that Frank had a direct influence on in terms of helping them get where they are today," said Evelyn.

Unfortunately, CSS/CON's staff fell prey to the country's economic woes. Grants and funding sources dried up, and last year Carol had to terminate all of her staff and her own position as well.

However, despite the loss of her husband and her job, Evelyn remains active as a CSS/CON volunteer. "There's still so much to be accomplished and so many people who need help. Frank wouldn't have wanted me to stop fighting. I think the idea is to keep believing that change is coming and then work to make it change for the better," she said.

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## Hartford Peacebuilders



*From left to right:*

Kennie Arzuaga, Iran Nazario, Warren Hardy, Frankie Agosto and Carlos Gonzalez

“From the outset, Hartford Peacebuilders has had one focus – preventing and reducing violence in the city of Hartford,” said Iran Nazario, the group’s Program Director. “We intervene in situations that may become violent and work to mediate those situations. We also try to prevent young people from getting involved with violence in the first place.”

Also breaking new ground as the first organization to receive a SINA Neighborhood Service Award (that honor is usually bestowed upon individuals), Hartford Peacebuilders arrived on the scene in November of 2007. A COMPASS (Community Parents and Students Succeeding) Youth Collaborative initiative with funding from the Hartford Office for Youth Services, Peacebuilders is a group of five totally committed individuals who regularly put their own lives on the line in an effort to prevent violence.

“When you’re out there, you have to think that it’s your own son or daughter who is in danger,” said Iran. “You would risk life and limb to stop them from getting hurt, and that’s what we have to do when a violent situation arises.”

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Although they are fearless in their approach, the Peacebuilders are not reckless or stupid. Iran described situations where he and his coworkers have literally stepped in front of someone holding a gun and convinced him not to shoot. But many long hours of hard work have paved the way for the successful defusing that the Peacebuilders have become known for.

***“Gunfire erupted and two of us ran towards the shooters. We were able to save one youth, but the other died in the arms of one of the Peacebuilders.”***

Iran described another situation where the Peacebuilders arrived on the scene just as

violence was unfolding. “Gunfire erupted and two of us ran towards the shooters. We were able to save one youth, but the other died in the arms of one of the Peacebuilders.”

“They have changed our whole perspective on violence and how we should deal with it,” said Rachel Rivera, Program Performance Manager for the Office of Youth Services. “It’s the very personal relationships that they have developed that allow them to convince someone not to retaliate when their friend or family member has been attacked. It’s a connection to an authority figure that is not from the schools or the cops or the homes.” Iran leads four other Peacebuilders – Kennie Arzuaga, Carlos Gonzalez, Frankie Agosto and Warren Hardy. A second Peacebuilders group works in Hartford’s North End. They all wear special T-shirts and jackets with a Peacebuilder insignia that is well-known on Hartford streets.

“We’re the ones in the middle,” Iran explained. “Between a young person and their parents, their enemy, the hospital, the police, the courts. In all of these situations, we’re there to try to work out a solution.”

At Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center, the Peacebuilders have developed a cooperative relationship with the hospital staff, and are called in to help quell violence after shootings and stabbings.

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They also work cooperatively with local merchants and the police department.

High-risk youth are brought to the Peacebuilders offices at Hartford Square West, in Sheldon/Charter Oak, to take a life skills class called Junior Peacebuilders. The eight-week curriculum teaches behavior and anger management and helps kids to develop conflict resolution skills. They also go on field trips and play flag football, basketball, and softball.

The next step gets participants involved in community service projects. When needed, connections are provided to professionals who can help who can help with more serious problems in the homes and lives of program participants.

“We have a group of 14 Junior Peacebuilders who have graduated high school and have moved on to successful careers or higher education,” said Iran. “Two are currently working for COMPASS.”

Iran said that Peacebuilders is an idea that could work in other cities and hopes to expand it in the future. “Other cities have tried programs through Police Explorers, but they haven’t worked. The reason we have been successful is that we’re not tied to the institutions that many young people see as a source of problems and conflicts.”



## *Paul Kapustinski*

Paul Kapustinski, RN, spends almost every waking hour helping people. He cares for sick and injured children in the Emergency Department (ED) at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center where he works as a staff nurse. And when he’s not working, he spends time every week serving meals at the Hartford

Rescue Mission on Main Street. But over the last two years, there has been a growing overlap in Paul’s two worlds.

His ongoing visits to the rescue mission caught the attention of his co-workers in the ED and they wanted to experience the same feeling of helping those less fortunate. Once a month, four or five of the staff from the medical center’s ED accompany Paul on one of his weekly visits to the mission where they serve meals and clean up after dinner. In total, about 35 Connecticut Children’s employees help cook the meals and take turns going to the rescue mission.

*“His ongoing visits to the rescue mission caught the attention of his co-workers in the ED and they wanted to experience the same feeling of helping those less fortunate.”*

“Paul is just a good person who is very quiet and unassuming,” said Karen Howard, RN, nurse manager of Connecticut Children’s

ED. “This isn’t something that Paul had to sell us on. He’s a shining example to the staff who actually went to him with this idea of helping out at the rescue mission.”

A wide array of staff—ranging from doctors and nurses to patient care associates and support staff—participate in helping at the rescue mission. The group even includes former employees of the ED, who continue to cook and accompany Paul to the shelter.



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REACH is sponsored by SINA and its member institutions.  
Our mission is to develop, support and recognize individuals who  
positively contribute to the growth of the Hartford Community.