SINA’s 14th Annual REACH Awards 2020
SINA thanks all the workers and organizations who are helping our community during the COVID19 pandemic.
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The SINA / Ivan A. Backer Scholarship program was established in 1997 in honor of Ivan Backer, who served as executive director and founder of SINA for nearly 20 years. The recipients are selected based on service to community, school, family, and academic achievement. The scholarship program consists of 3 awards of $4,000 ($1,000 per year for 4 years) to Bulkeley High School seniors continuing their education at an accredited 4-year post-secondary program.

**Abedin Abedini**

Abedin Abedini was captain of the soccer and volleyball teams at Bulkeley, and on the swim team. “He encourages others to excel in team spirit and academic responsibility,” according to teacher Corey Moses. Abedin has been on the honor roll every year and is 6th in his class, while also holding down jobs in retail. He has a “willingness to get involved, to be an active participant”, says teacher Peter Torrey. Abedin believes “giving back to your community won’t hurt you in any way. Standing still and not doing anything will.” He plans to attend the University of Saint Joseph, where he will play soccer.
Tiana Brathwaite

Tiana Brathwaite was co-president of the National Honor Society at Bulkeley, on the honor roll, and played the flute. Teacher Kevin Clemons says she is “very intelligent, organized, and dedicated to making her world a better place.” Tiana’s volunteer activities include backstage crew for events, blood drives and homeless shelters. She explains NHA gave her confidence, saying “just because you might have grown up in a struggling community, it does not define you as a person. You can still achieve great things.” Teacher Laura Smith admires Tiana’s coordinating a “wide variety of community building events.” Tiana will attend Eastern Connecticut State University to become a social worker or child psychologist.
Moctar Mohammat lived in poverty in Africa and was orphaned when his village was destroyed. He walked through many countries to an orphanage where he was able attend school. Sent to the US, he was considered an adult and had to fight to complete his education at Bulkeley. Moctar works in customer service and as a cook to support himself, in addition to playing varsity soccer and making the honor roll. School counselor Marissa Scarano says he has “a passion for education. His dream is to help others who are marginalized, particularly refugees.” Moctar will play soccer at the University of Saint Joseph and study International Relations/Political Science.

**Moctar Mohammat**
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). This year five scholarships were awarded in the combined amount of $2,500 to full or part time students, who reside in the 06106 or 06114 zip codes, and who have completed at least one semester of study.

Edward M. Ramirez Cahuana earned a Business Associate degree at Capital Community College, where he was on the Dean’s List and had a full course load while also working full time. His goal is to major in business at Central Connecticut State University and start his own company.

Professor Seth Freeman says “Edward is very deserving of support because of his demonstrated hard work ethic, strong academic performance and strong drive to succeed academically and professionally.”
Gabriella Adriana Bastos Chaves

Gabriella Adriana Bastos Chaves is a student at Capital Community College, determined to achieve her goal of attending medical school to become an obstetrician. Having grown up near a hospital in Brazil inspires her, as does her love for babies. Instructor Linda Cocchiola is impressed by Gabriella’s “ability to adapt quickly to the demands of a college experience in a new country and culture. She is a determined student who performs at a high level with great self-discipline and confidence.”

“To me this scholarship shows that anything is possible and my hard work and dedication to my studies is being recognized. This scholarship will help me work harder and help boost my motivation. I will use this scholarship to help pay for my books and tuition.”

- Gabriella Chaves
Paola P. Alvarado Dominguez

Paola P. Alvarado Dominguez attained Dean’s List at Capital Community College before transferring to Central Connecticut State University to study Management Information Systems. She is also employed by Hartford Public Schools as a para-professional for a student with special needs, where teacher Diana Martinez recognizes Paola’s “amazing ability to connect with students as well as colleagues.” Seth Freeman, her advisor at CCC, says Diana is “very studious and focused, goal-oriented, and committed to her studies and to succeeding academically.”
Amyah Harris

Amyah Harris is a General Studies major at Capital Community College. She grew up watching her mother struggle and has memories of standing in line at the Department of Social Services. She views these memories as, “the exact reminder I use every day to push myself to strive in my educational career.” Her Professor Kenneth DiMaggio recognizes her talents, calling her “one of those gifted writers who has what is called “a voice.” Her writing, thinking and classroom leadership are topnotch.” Amyah plans to become a nurse.
Khalil K. Howe

Khalil K. Howe is a computer science student at Capital Community College and the first in his family to attend college. Watching his single mother struggle to pay bills, he concluded “the only sure way to rescue my family from poverty is through an education.” Michael Kriscenski, his instructor and counselor, says “Khalil is a hard-working student with the right attitude, determination and work ethic to make him successful in both his academics and eventually the work world.”
Kelly Styles is the former Senior VP, Chief Information Officer at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center. His passion is to support young people going into a career pursuing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (S.T.E.M.) Kelly retired from Connecticut Children’s in June 2020, and as a tribute to him, generous individuals of the Connecticut Children’s Information Solutions department donated the funds to create the Kelly Styles S.T.E.M. Scholarship. The scholarship provides a deserving graduating senior with $2,000 to continue their education in a post-secondary program related to STEM.

Sirak Hadgu

Sirak Hadgu, is this year’s selected recipient of the Kelly Styles STEM Scholarship. Sirak graduated from Bulkeley High School. There he played varsity soccer, was a member of the
National Honor Society, and participated in a youth training program through Leadership Greater Hartford.

Sirak worked with Michele Maccarone Brophy of the Hartford Public Library as a program assistant, who describes him as “very hard working, motivated and dependable – while working two other summer jobs.” His ESOL teacher, Edlira Beda, describes Sirak as “an outstanding student who takes learning seriously and has shown leadership skills in sports.”

Sirak’s parents emphasized the importance of education even though his childhood in Eritrea didn’t offer good opportunities. When his family was reunited in the US after four dangerous years of separation, he immediately focused on education. Sirak plans to attend Manchester Community College and will pursue a career in Computer Science.
Neighborhood Service Awards

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

Delene Richards Falcon

Delene Falcon didn’t think about being a role model. Instead, she used to notice empty buildings and think about becoming a developer by starting with one, rehabilitating it, and selling it. She laughs now about how “unrealistic that was, now that I see what SINA does, how much work it takes, and how many people. When I saw SINA was doing it, I wanted to jump in and help.”
Back then, Delene saw that “people felt powerless, and believed nobody cared about us. I felt differently, and wanted to change it.” She is excited about how people responded to SINA’s efforts, such as the neighborhood cleanups. There used to be trash all around, but Delene says after the cleanups “I couldn’t believe it, everything was clean and nice, I had to pinch myself.” She explains now that the neighborhood is cleaner “the most amazing thing is people from surrounding towns used to come here to do bad things. Now they need to look somewhere else, or get help instead.”

Logan Singerman of SINA, who nominated Delene, calls her “the definition of a dedicated, committed, enthusiastic and passionate” volunteer. She loves kids, and chose a SINA home because she wanted to make Hartford better. He says “Delene has been a leader in every single Frog Hollow SAFE project and has attended all the cleanups. She and her husband helped me gather input for our playground project and are very involved in it. She takes her role as a resident seriously, planting flowers to beautify the street so people don’t dump trash.”

Delene believes in making things happen, and creating positive change. She is happy to partner with SINA, and is grateful for their “amazing hard work and being part of the community. Thank you!”
Elizabeth Giannetta-Ramos was one of the founders of Compass Youth Collaborative, and is now the Director of Partnerships. She explains the organization started as the Southend Knight Riders after her father dragged her to a community meeting. She was 15, and heard residents complaining about young people destroying the south end. Liz countered there was nothing for teenagers to do, and someone challenged her to do something about it. She did, working with then Mayor Mike Peters to establish a youth center, which quickly gained popularity and outgrew its space. “And I’ve been there ever since, for 25 years,” Liz says with a laugh.
She attributes her success to her dad, known as “nosy Pablo,” who accompanied her to City Council meetings. Liz states “if not for him, so many young people wouldn’t have this safe haven. He’s helped employ people and has saved kids’ lives.”

Upon learning she had won the award, Liz says “I was completely shocked. It’s an honor!” “That is typical of Liz” says Jackie Santiago, the Compass CEO who nominated her. “She is so humble, and doesn’t realize the magnitude of her impact. She has transformed lives.” Explaining that Liz has been an amazing advocate for teens, Jackie says “young people from the early days of the organization still call Liz for mentorship. She listens and is empathetic. Liz has not only the most amazing and beautiful heart, she’s hard working and completely selfless. I’m so excited about this because she truly is really deserving.”

Liz explains the young people are dealing with many things we don’t see. “I try to put myself in the kids’ shoes and think of what they want. The young peoples’ resiliency is what keeps me going.”
Athania Ramos was the third employee at CREC Impact Academy, and has been delighted to see it grow from a pilot with seven students, to 20 in the second year, to 40 this year. As a social worker, she believes in the principal’s vision to “do high school differently. Kids can’t all learn the same way. Here, they get a new opportunity.” The personalized, hands-on approach of Impact Academy is based on “student voice, student choice.”

“We are very much a family,” she emphasizes. “Our parents don’t get robocalls. We have a 10:1 ratio in the classroom, so students don’t get lost.” Athania teaches a class called Learning to Live where students choose the topics. They often include “all those things we don’t want to talk about” to help kids learn about available resources and sound decision making.
Nilda Fernandez, a UConn social worker who nominated Impact Academy, delivered a program there two years ago and “fell in love with the concept.” She has seen the benefits of “project-based learning, for kids who aren’t thriving in traditional, streamlined high schools.” Nilda admires the “enriched learning with psychosocial support, with a social worker who talks to them, rather than reprimands them.” She adds “it’s a great system and I hope they’re able to expand it. Kudos to CREC for thinking outside of the box.”

“The difference between Impact Academy and other schools is the students feel heard,” explains Athania. “Even during the pandemic, we quickly revamped the science class to make masks with a 3D printer and a sewing machine. We had our kids go out and protest. It was so powerful as an adult to hear what these 16 and 17 year olds had to say.” Ultimately, she says, “our kids come in every day. For me, that speaks volumes.”
The Stephen Balcanoff award was formerly known as the SINA institutional award. Each year SINA gives out an institutional award that recognizes and honors an employee from one of our three institutions, Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, Hartford Hospital, or Trinity College. In addition to being valued and excellent contributors at their positions, the recipients of the award go above and beyond the call of duty and contribute significantly to the betterment of the Hartford neighborhoods.

This year, SINA has decided to rename the institutional award the Stephen Balcanoff Award in honor of the many years that Steve contributed to the Hartford community, and in particular, to the residents of Frog Hollow. Until his recent retirement, Steve was a highly valued member of the staff at Connecticut Children’s, serving in a variety of roles which always connected him to the greater Hartford community. In addition to his day job, he was also involved with SINA as board member or helper since the hospital moved to its current location in Hartford in the 1990’s. He was the chair of SINA’s REACH Committee, which manages the Neighborhood Service Award, scholarship programs, and school partnerships including collaboration on science fairs. Most recently he spearheaded REACH’s efforts to develop a book donation program for students at the local elementary school.
Eric Galm of Trinity College is this year’s recipient of the Stephen Balcanoff Award. Eric earned degrees from Michigan, Tufts and Wesleyan, and says he was “brought to Trinity to not only teach and work with local musicians, but also to use my position as a public-facing component of the music department.” And that he has done! Eric created Trinity’s samba ensemble which he explains is “not just for trained musicians, but for students throughout campus to have a hands-on experience and learn about Brazilian culture.” He then organized SambaFest, a public festival and celebration to expose more people to the connections between jazz, Cuban music, steel pan music, Brazilian samba, and other aspects of the African diaspora. Eric’s “musical evangelism” helps people “start to see these are all cousins, to pick up on the connections.” He believes “the more we can educate through celebration, to increase acknowledgement and acceptance, the better.”
He estimates 60,000 people have been directly influenced by his programs.

Eric serves as Associate Professor of Music and Ethnomusicology, Chair of the Department of Music, and Co-Director, Center for Caribbean Studies. In addition to the normal administrative workload that requires, he runs SambaFest, and presents performances in Hartford and West Hartford schools. Eric also serves on an advisory committee at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving to support artists of color. He brought a group of young people to visit musicians in Brazil, then arranged to reciprocate with a conference and performance at Trinity. Eric is constantly looking for opportunities to “showcase student academic work at these events, to give people a sense of the type of work Trinity is doing.”

Sonia Cardenas, Acting Dean of the Faculty and Vice President of Academic Affairs, describes Professor Eric Galm as “a global ethnomusicologist who embodies Trinity’s mission of boldly transforming his students and the world. His creativity as a teacher and scholar is matched by his deep commitment to partnering with local communities. Whether launching SambaFest, working alongside Brazilian leaders, consulting for K-12 institutions, or organizing arts exchanges across the Americas, Eric is passionate about everything he does. An unrelenting optimist, Eric brings a spirit of innovation and collaboration to any initiative, making him a highly valued partner to many members of our community—on and off Trinity’s campus.”
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REACH is sponsored by SINA and its member institutions:
Trinity College,
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The REACH Committee’s mission is to develop, support and recognize individuals who positively contribute to the growth of the Hartford Community.