



Recognition • Education • Achievement • Community Health

SINA's
15th Annual
REACH Awards
2021

Program

Masters of Ceremonies

Ryan Calhoun

*Senior Director for Strategy and Network Development
Connecticut Children's Medical Center*

Ariel Pino

*Manager, Guest Services Department
Hartford Hospital*



Welcome

Jane Baird

*SINA Board Chair
Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance*

Melvyn Colón

*Executive Director
Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance*

Bimal Patel

*President
Hartford Hospital*



Awards Presentation

Ivan A. Backer Scholarship

Presented By: Nancy Mendez, Cynthia Mena, and Kerri Zimmerman

Kelly Styles S.T.E.M Scholarship

Presented By: Phil Hopkins, Connecticut Children's

SINA Student Support Scholarship

Presented By: Ana Marie Basche

Neighborhood Service Award

Presented By: Rob O'Connor, Edward Casares, and Ana Alfaro

Stephen Balcanoff Award

Presented By: Mary Diaz-Raymond, Hartford Hospital



Closing Remarks

FROG HOLLOW COMMUNITY CLEAN UP COMPETITION

Saturday, June 26th & July 31st

10 AM - 1 PM

Location TBD

SIGN UP BY CONTACTING
Logan Singerman at (860) 929-6039
lsingerman@sinainc.org

CLEAN STREETS = SAFE STREETS

Frog Hollow S.A.F.E.
[Safety Alliance for Everyone]

 @froghollowSAFE



Summer Readers

needed between
July 5th - July 30th

Hispanic Health Council

Serve as a guest reader for elementary school students in the South end of Hartford. Share about your career and read a book. Read for 30-60 minutes. Pick a time slot Monday through Thursday between 12:30 PM and 3:30 PM

Hartford Public Library

Serve as a guest on virtual Storytime with Ms. Nancy! Available slots every week at 10 am. Other times can also be arranged. Visit www.sinainc.org/HPLstorytime to see upcoming dates.

Interested? Contact Logan Singerman at lsingerman@sinainc.org

Table of Contents

Ivan A. Backer Scholarship ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ pg 05

Kelly Styles STEM Scholarship ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ pg 08

SINA Student Support Scholarship ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ pg 10

Neighborhood Service Awards ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ pg 14

Stephen Balcanoff Award ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ pg 20

SINA Members ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ pg 24

REACH Committee Members ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ pg 25



Ivan A. Backer Scholarship

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. SINA is delighted to celebrate the following Bulkeley High School students as recipients of our 2021 Ivan A. Backer Scholarships.



Marilexis Abreu

Marilexis Abreu, who is class valedictorian and will attend UConn as a business major, says “I would like to be my own boss.” She was on the school volleyball team and worked a paid job, too, while earning honors and successfully battling depression. Marilexis explains “It can be very hard for people to speak out because they don’t want to be judged. Being able to speak about my experience, and knowing that sharing my story can help someone else, brings me great joy.” She is also involved in numerous volunteer activities, including a church youth group, Latinos in Action, Unity Walk Against Gun Violence, Latinas and Power Symposium, and Making Strides Against Breast Cancer. She is thankful for the scholarship, which “gives me great pleasure, knowing I will be part of a wonderful team.”



Samantha Fonseca

Samantha Fonseca will attend UConn's Hartford campus in the fall, to major in Biological Sciences. She ranked third in her graduating class, played varsity soccer and was on the track team, while participating in many volunteer activities. Samantha was vice president of Latinos in Action Club and participated in Leadership Greater Hartford's Summer Nexus program. Her other community activities include Hartford Youth Advisory Board, Latinos in Progress and Hartford Food Systems. She says "I didn't know English when I arrived in the United States three years ago, and found many organizations that offered help. This is why community involvement is important to me, so I can support and care for others in turn. I am overjoyed to receive this scholarship, which will be very beneficial."



Alimeline Irankunda

Alimeline Irankunda is number two in her class and will attend UConn as a pre-med student, majoring in biological sciences with a minor in business. Her goal is to become an OBGYN and to own a hospital at a refugee camp. Her experience growing up in a refugee camp showed her that women and children were not getting enough healthcare. The long lines for treatment made her wish she was a doctor and could help. Alimeline ran varsity track, and participated in Leadership Greater Hartford's Summer Nexus program, Model United Nations and the Grow Hartford Youth Program. She says "This scholarship is an honor and will allow me to attend college without taking out loans. I will work hard to live up to the faith you have placed in me."

Kelly Styles STEM Scholarship



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.



Saskia Linton

Saskia Linton, who graduated from the Global Communications Academy/Bulkeley High School, is the 2021 Kelly Styles STEM Scholarship recipient. The scholarship provides \$2,000 the first year and \$1,000 more if Saskia remains in good standing.

Saskia is “a role model and inspiration,” says a teacher, Kimberly Childress. “She is organized, disciplined and willing to go beyond what is required. She took classes for credit at Capital Community College that weren’t offered at our high school. Saskia participated in the University of Connecticut Health Careers Opportunities Program, served on student council and played varsity softball. She was selected to sit on the Citywide Student Senate, representing 19,000 students to the superintendent and her cabinet. Saskia is a practical, amicable, mature and driven young woman, from whom I expect great things.”



“Living in Jamaica, I was surrounded by nature,” says Saskia. “There were flowers, fruit trees, insects and animals everywhere. My current home is much different. Nature isn’t as highly regarded and cherished as things like money and fame. Deforestation, pollution and habitat destruction are threats. I started my environmental activism by adopting a vegetarian diet, cutting back on single-use plastics and pushing my family to be environmentally friendly. At school I encouraged my friends, and for my capstone project I started a small business to help low-income families afford sustainable products.”

Saskia plans to attend Northwestern University as a biology major, with a double minor in global health and conservation. Her goal is environmental activism work, educating people living in poverty. She believes “everyone should have a fair shot at living the healthiest lifestyle they can, and doing it sustainably.”

SINA Student Support Scholarship

The purpose of the SINA Student Support Scholarship, established in 2012, is to provide much-needed financial support to students who are attending Capital Community College (CCC). SINA is delighted to celebrate the following recipients of our 2021 SINA Student Support Scholarship.



Axcel Diaz

Axcel Diaz is a psychology student at Capital Community College who says “therapy saved me from a life in the streets. All I see around me is struggle – drug addicts, homeless people, people in handcuffs – and I could have easily got into that lifestyle for the money and popularity. My mom knew that and sent me to therapy, where I learned how to cope with difficult situations. I’m already on a path to success as the first kid in my family to start college, and with this scholarship I can look towards the future.” Scott McGregor, a psychiatrist at The Village for Families and Children, says Axcel’s “great attitude, enthusiasm, hard work and compassion will make him an asset to everyone he encounters.”



Felecia Ferrigon

Felecia Ferrigon is a healthcare student at Capital Community College who has always dreamed of being a nurse. She says “our healthcare system is experiencing a lot of pressure. Having well-trained nurses who are passionate about the field will impact many lives. Nursing allows me to put into practice my genuine love for humanity.” Jolyne Cayo, instructor in the certified nursing assistant program at Hartford JobCorps Academy, says Felecia “is a great student with excellent leadership skills. She is active and driven, performing all patient care activities with devotion and a smile. In addition to her friendly personality, she is able to take control in emergency situations, present creative ideas, and help keep other trainees engaged.”



Hanny Solange Gutierrez Tovar

Hanny Solange Gutierrez Tovar is a general studies major at Capital Community College who arrived in the United States four years ago and “realized that becoming fluent in English was very important” to her success. Inspired by her mother, who is a teacher, Hanny’s goal is to become an engineer because “from a very young age, I have really liked mathematics, problem solving, and analytical thinking.” Stephen Olshewski, her tutor through Literacy Volunteers, says “I’ve never known anyone as disciplined and hardworking as Hanny. She is very intelligent and one of my best students. Hanny finds time to tutor other students while also holding down a weekend job.”



Khalil K. Howe

Khalil K. Howe is a computer science student at Capital Community College who realized “my family’s escape path from poverty had to be paved by me, using education.” Active in many extracurricular activities, he says “I never lose sight of my purpose for pursuing higher education. It is also my desire to initiate an organization for the minorities, supplying them with uniforms, educational materials and tablets that will help others discover the power of an education.” Ricardo Martinez, Khalil’s math professor, says “he exhibited excellent determination, even after last year’s forced transition to virtual learning,” while Donald Buda, his English professor, noted Khalil’s “extraordinary effort and impressive leadership capabilities.”

Neighborhood Service Awards

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



Jordan Dikagoros

Jordan Dikagoros is the second-generation owner of J Restaurant, proudly growing the pizza place his father founded 51 years ago into an important neighborhood anchor. “Over the years we have redefined ourselves, building on what we had,” Jordan explains. He likes to say “the doctors take care of the patients, and we take care of families.” His restaurant is the warm, welcoming place that provides food, drink and time away from the stress of dealing with a loved one’s illness.

Once COVID hit, Jordan had to shift gears.

J Restaurant set up a variety of outside dining options to continue helping. “We’re across the street from the hospital, we’re not going to turn our backs on them. We become like family, we get close with them during the toughest of times.” The restaurant has protocols in place to protect vulnerable patients, families and healthcare workers.

The restaurant provided for hospital staff, delivering thousands of affordable meals when the state was shut down. “We delivered them in a truck, carrying eight bags on a pole,” says Jordan. Rob O’Connor, CEO of Thomas Rafferty Company, says Jordan “has been a force for so many years. He’s quiet, long term and steady, leading by example. He’s about feeding and taking care of people, providing a refuge.” In nominating Jordan, Rob said “he’s a phenomenal employer who takes care of his people and provides jobs in the neighborhood.”

Rob cited not only Jordan’s pandemic innovations – lunches for healthcare employees, gazebos and dining trailers in his parking lot – but also his ongoing community engagement. On New Year’s Eve, Jordan regularly creates a mini-Times Square for patients at the hospitals, dropping an eight-foot ball for them to enjoy at 6:00 and midnight – increased to hourly during COVID. Jordan says “I love Hartford and want to change the image people have of Frog Hollow. I want them to come to know it as midtown Hartford.”





Lieutenant Jesus Lopez

Lt. Jesus Lopez, of Hartford Fire Department's Special Services division, says "winning this award is surreal," since there is nothing he enjoys more than talking to people and dealing with community members. He credits his mother, who, when they moved to the south end, "created a monster by telling me 'go outside, and don't come back until you make a few friends.'"

He has been outgoing ever since, whether lifeguarding, tutoring in the afterschool program at the Village for Families and Children, working with youth at Klingberg Family Center, or applying for a job in the fire department – all of which he did while attending college. "I like to stay busy," he explains, working full

time in the fire department while going back to school for a degree in rehab and substance abuse counseling, during which he interned at Catholic Charity's Institute for the Hispanic Family.

“Jesus has committed his career and much of his personal life to the betterment of Hartford,” says Edward Casares, who nominated him. “You’ll often find him at charitable events, such as the CRT Hurricane Maria relief center, or walks in support of Interval House and Catholic Charities. He is a hard-working, results-oriented individual.” His volunteer work includes Career Beginnings through the Hartford Consortium, the Juvenile Review Board, and Hispanic American Veterans of CT, where he is the only nonmilitary member. He was part of relief efforts in Puerto Rico after the hurricane, delivering cash to veterans.

All this is useful in his current role, says Jesus, because “we provide full service, from fire prevention training to post-fire relocation for families who were displaced. When I’m dealing with families in crisis, my passion kicks in.” He also manages multiple programs, including Explorers, Cadets, Hartford CERT (community emergency response team) and liaison with schools and neighborhood associations. Jesus is thankful that “my wife is a great support system. She’s a product of Hartford, too, and we have similar views of community.”





Graciela Rivera

Graciela Rivera, manager of Hartford Public Library’s Park Street branch, credits much of her success in life to the stability provided by her family’s move to Hartford when she was 12 years old. She would “visit the library often, because it was a welcoming space with access to resources.” She got her first official job at a library while she attended UConn, supporting herself and her child because, she explains, “I didn’t want to be that statistic. I want to be the person who can model other outcomes.”

Working in Hartford’s schools, Graciela was driven to be successful and is grateful to those who offered support. This award is

“very humbling, and being in this position now is a way for me to give back to the community. Civic engagement is such a big thing for me because Hartford residents don’t always own their space, with so many negative attitudes about the city. I want youth in Hartford to feel proud, to look forward to the future, and to know the library is a welcoming space.”

Ana Alfaro, community relations manager for Eversource, serves on the library board of directors and nominated Graciela for the award. Knowing Graciela’s mother is active in the community, she says “I see her influence and activism in her daughter. Graciela is a natural-born leader who is passionate about her work, eager to learn, and cares very much about the community. I’ve seen her walk immigrant families through the library, making sure they’re exposed to opportunities.”

Graciela works closely with nearby schools and Neighborhood Revitalization Zone groups. She has helped the community with a support group to raise awareness of domestic violence, a community garden and a mural. “The fact that I was stable here made all the difference as a kid,” says Graciela. “I want to be able to share that and honor it, because the neighborhood has given me so much.”



Stephen Balcanoff Award



Carmen Vidot

Carmen Vidot of Hartford Hospital's Department of Dentistry is the 2021 winner of SINA's Institutional Award, now known as the Stephen Balcanoff Award. The award honors long-time SINA board member Steve Balcanoff, who retired last year after more than 40 years at Connecticut Children's. Steve chaired the REACH committee, which manages the annual event where we celebrate our Neighborhood Service Award winners and scholarships winners. This award recognizes someone whose dedication to community service echoes Steve's, and who is an employee of one of SINA's three anchor institutions.

Working at the hospital for 30 years, and doing volunteer work the whole time, Carmen's wish is for more hours in the day to do even more. She explains "I come from a family who are involved in the community, who try to do the right thing and to practice kindness. When I grew up in New York, my grandmother was always cooking and babysitting for neighborhood kids. Living in Puerto Rico with my mom, she was always volunteering at the elementary school, sewing parade costumes, and more. It's a family tradition – everybody needs to be kind to each other."



Carmen got involved with the Hartford Boys and Girls Club through her grandson. She donates for field trips, brings refreshments, helps clean up, and says "it's the happiness of the children that matters, making memories and sharing experiences." Carmen is also very active in fundraising for CREC-Metropolitan Learning Center. During the pandemic she has been delivering groceries for home-bound elderly and donating to make masks for those in need, while continuing to care for her grandson and her ailing mother. In her view, "sometimes it's the small things that mean a lot."

Mary Diaz Richardson, who nominated Carmen, describes her as “a very giving person. She comes in early if we need her and she always volunteers to stay if patients are running late. She has a palpable dedication to ensuring service excellence. Carmen explains “patients who come into our clinic sometimes come alone, and they need help or direction. I feel the need to help.”

“Carmen is a dental assistant who goes above and beyond for our patients and colleagues,” says Mary. “She does program outreach in the cafeteria to make people aware of our services. Carmen is always the one who remembers birthdays, buys gifts, and recognizes fellow employees. Before COVID, she participated in the Community Day at CHS and the Mission of Mercy, community events providing free dental services to Hartford residents.” Carmen insists “helping makes me feel good,” so she was “surprised, deeply humbled and grateful” to receive this award, while Mary states firmly “I could tell Carmen was special from the minute I met her.”



**Know of anyone deserving of the
2022 Neighborhood Service Awards?**

Visit www.sinainc.org/nsa2022
to submit your 2022 nomination.

**Interested in joining the
REACH Committee?**

Contact Linda Torres at
lvalentin@sinainc.org
or call (860) 493-1618.

Visit www.sinainc.org/reach for more information.

**Donate to the
Kelly Styles S.T.E.M Scholarship
through GoFundMe
www.gofund.me/fa049db5**

For more information visit
www.sinainc.org/stem_scholarship.

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*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.



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