



Serena Laws, PhD., an assistant professor in Trinity College's department of Public Policy and Law, is the 2023 winner of **SINA's Stephen Balcanoff Award**. The award recognizes an employee of one of SINA's three anchor institutions who demonstrates exemplary dedication to community service.

Serena was nominated for her work on VITA, a tax preparation service that serves neighborhood residents and operates from Trinfo Café. "VITA has an IRS-funded curriculum that teaches students how to prepare tax returns, and gives them contact with the community to help them understand concepts taught in class," Serena explained. This year, 629 tax returns were filed for residents by 21 students at VITA, helping neighborhood families avoid \$138K in tax preparation fees. It is "a community partnership with real mutual benefits."

The **Kelly Styles STEM Scholarships** have been awarded for three years by Connecticut Children's Information Solutions Department employees in honor of their retired colleague, Kelly Styles. Navita Budhoo and Ty'Laisha Huff were this year's recipients.

Ty'Laisha attends CREC Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts and plans to major in nursing at UConn. Navita attended Bulkeley High School. She is passionate about helping others and is excited about a nursing career because it will enable her to help others every day. Navita also received this year's Ivan Backer Scholarship.



The other two **Ivan A. Backer Scholarship** recipients were Antonio Monteiro Santos and Shinning Lovely Shar.

Antonio graduated from Pathways Academy of Technology and Design and plans on attending Full Sail University to major in Creative Writing BFA. Shinning graduated from Sport and Medical Sciences Academy. She plans to attend the UCONN Hartford campus to major in Communication.

This year **SINA Student Support Scholarships** were awarded to Capital Community College (CCC) Students: Luz E. Berdecia, Judith Appah, Alondra Cotto and Leslie V. Padilla Martinez.

Luz is currently working as a medical assistant at Hartford Hospital and plans to become an APRN. Judith studies nursing while volunteering at Connecticut Children's, and teaches at Sunday school, explaining "I just really do like children." Alondra plans to become a nurse. Despite moving here from Puerto Rico just five years ago and having to learn English, she is a mentor both for ESL students and at the Hartford Public Library, where she helps kids with homework. Leslie graduated CCC and is now a nurse at Hartford Hospital. A first-generation Mexican-American, she trained to be a licensed hairdresser, and "would listen to clients' problems, but couldn't do much, so I decided to be in a role where I can help people more."



About SINA

Since its founding in 1977 SINA has worked with residents and community organizations on issues such as affordable rental housing, education, public safety, homeownership and employment. With nearly 100 homes built, a thriving Walk to Work Program, and the creation of community gardens and murals, its visible impact in the Frog Hollow, Barry Square and South Green neighborhoods has been significant. SINA continues operations today in offices at 207 Washington Street. For more information call (860) 493-1618.

Neighborhood Heroes Mural



Our latest Frog Hollow Hero mural was completed on the corner of Cedar and Park Street honoring Gladys Rivera and Sammy Vega. Both embody the importance of celebrating culture and history and passing that on to the next generation. The mural was painted by local artists Lindaluz Carillo and Mercury using colors prominent in Puerto Rico and incorporating Taino patterns and symbols.

We will be painting two more murals this year. One will honor three heroes and another will center on the theme behind all the mural- Nuestra Historia. It will encourage viewers to reflect on how the past impacts our present and how we in the future are writing history today.



Student Authors Honored

SINA is a partnership between Connecticut Children's, Hartford Hospital and Trinity College. SINA's mission is to work cooperatively with community stakeholders to restore economic vitality and improve the quality of life for the people who live, work, play, and study in the neighborhoods of South Central Hartford.





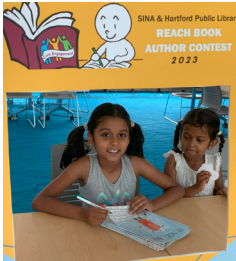
Student Authors Honored

The REACH Youth Authors Awards ceremony was held June 5 at Hartford Public Library Park Street Branch @ the Lyric to honor local students who have written books. Students in grades K through 5 entered a civic engagement-themed book writing contest. Winners' books were published, printed and bound by the Hartford Public Schools print shop, with copyrights, International Standard Book Numbers (ISBN) and bar codes. Copies were provided to all Hartford Public Librarys. The winning entries were the following.



Alexandra Being a Hero to the Community is written by Saymara Maldonado, and illustrated by Saymara, Nayely Ortiz and Anthony Escalante. They are fifth graders in the Hispanic Health Council's after-school program at Maria Sanchez School. The book is about Alexandra helping citizens of California after wild fires.

Caring About the Ocean is written and illustrated by Bianca Boza Merino Bianca is a second grader at Maria Sanchez School. The book is about cleaning the ocean so that creatures that live in the ocean don't get hurt.



Hungry Bob is written and illustrated by Dhyanaa Satish Kumar, a winning author for the second year in a row. A Hartford resident, Dhyanaa is a second grader at Glastonbury East Hartford Magnet School. The book is about picking up trash and keeping the community clean.

NEVER Fear To Volunteer is written by Paula Sanchez-Barreto with illustrations by Paula, Mallory Velzaquez and Madison Malone (featured on front cover). They are fourth graders at CREC Ana Grace Academy of the Arts Elementary Magnet School. The book is about volunteering in the community.



Keeping Tommy's Animal Shelter Open is written by Jayden and Kayden Medina, and illustrated by Victor Rojas and Jonathan Velez. They are fourth grade students in the Hispanic Health Council's after-school program at Maria Sanchez School. The book is about Josh getting the community to donate to Tommy's shelter.

Stopping Light Pollution is written and illustrated by Sandrialy Rivera, a second grader at Maria Sanchez School. The book is about a fairy who gets help from birds to stop light pollution.



The Hunger Heroes is written and illustrated by Anaya Gupta, in grade two at Betances Learning Lab Elementary School. The book is about a group of heroes fighting community hunger.

Yes, We Can Sí, Se Puede is written and illustrated by Melanie Perez, a third grader at CREC Montessori Magnet School. The book is about community park cleanup and beautification.



VIVA MEXICO - Retail Success Story

Viva Mexico Taqueria at 633 Park Street is a family-owned business that started out as a specialty grocery store across the street. Rolando, the owner, originally immigrated from Mexico to California where he worked in restaurants washing dishes and cleaning tables. He dreamed of one day opening up his own restaurant. When he moved to Connecticut, he noticed the growing Mexican community didn't have a place to buy specialty items. He began selling goods door to door. Twenty-two years ago, realizing the need, he opened up the grocery store on Park Street. As demand grew for the couple's catering services and prepared foods, they decided to open up the restaurant.

"You can tell how good a Mexican restaurant is by tasting their sauce," Roland explained. "If their sauce is good, their food will be good." Luckily, Rolando and family makes their own sauce from scratch every day as well as the tortillas. With delicious food, generous portions, and affordable prices, Viva Mexico has become a popular destination in the neighborhood for eating authentic Mexican food.



REACH Awardees Celebrated

SINA's 17th Annual REACH Award Ceremony was held June 1 at Trinity. The dinner honors winners of the Neighborhood Service Awards, Stephen Balcanoff Institutional Award, Kelly Styles STEM Scholarship, Ivan Backer Scholarship, and SINA Student Support Scholarship.

Neighborhood Service Award awardees were Dinora Lopez, Andy Hart, and Walden St. Juste.

Walden St. Juste is a paraprofessional for Hartford Public Schools who founded and runs CT Scholars, a nonprofit program to help kids play basketball while maintaining a focus on education. Recently, he also opened Bros Dough Pizzeria, from which he donates food to kids' sports teams. "He's kind, caring, and one of those people who would give the shirt off his back," says Hyacinth Yennie, who nominated Walden.



Andy Hart is the photographer for Hartford News. There he was writing stories and taking photos, and, discovering photography was "more fun than meetings," he realized he had found his calling. "He is one of the best storytellers in Hartford, without using words," explains Jackie Mandyck, who nominated Andy. "He makes you fall in love with Hartford."

Dinora Lopez, Esq. is Senior Vice President and Associate General Counsel at Liberty Bank. She was raised by parents fighting addiction, survived an abusive marriage, and gained custody of her younger sister shortly after high school. This introduction to the legal system made her realize she could be a lawyer. Her husband, Jesus, who nominated her for this award, describes Dinora as "my role model," explaining that "being at the bottom, part of the system... Dinora understands and has empathy. She's giving back, because she used to use the services."



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