



Recognition • Education • Achievement • Community Health

*SINA's 17th Annual
REACH Awards
Ceremony*

Thursday, June 1, 2023

5:00 pm - 8:00 pm

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

2023 REACH Committee

Ryan Calhoun

Connecticut Children's
REACH CHAIR

Elizabeth Giannetta-Ramos*

COMPASS
Youth Collaborative, Inc.

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Connecticut Children's

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SINA

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Trinity College

Nancy Mendez*

Hartford Public Library

Karolina Barrientos*

Trinity College

Graciela Rivera*

Hartford Public Library

Anna Marie Basche

Capital Community College

Laura Marin Ruiz

Connecticut Children's

Zuleica Castro

Hartford Hospital

Logan Singerman*

SINA

Yesenia Conde*

Hispanic Health Council

Linda Torres*

SINA

Carmen Diaz

Hartford Hospital

Kerri Zimmerman

Connecticut Children's

Nilda Fernandez

UConn Health /
Connecticut Children's

* Community Projects Subcommittee Member

Program

Masters of Ceremonies

Elizabeth Giannetta-Ramos,
Director of Partnerships & Specialty Programs,
COMPASS Youth Collaborative, Inc.

Yesenia Conde
Director of Parent & Family Learning Center,
Family Resource Center Coordinator
Hispanic Health Council

Welcome

Joanne Berger-Sweeney, PhD
President,
Trinity College

Jane Baird,
Senior Director of External Relations,
Connecticut Children's
& SINA Board Chair

Melvyn Colón,
Executive Director,
SINA Inc.

Awards Presentation

Kelly Styles STEM Scholarship
Presented by: Linda Torres & Kerri Zimmerman

Ivan A. Backer Scholarship
Presented by: Kerri Zimmerman, and Nancy Mendez

SINA Student Support Scholarship
Presented by: Ana Marie Basche, Laura Marin Ruiz,
Nancy Mendez, and Jessica Andry

Neighborhood Service Award
Presented by: Jesus Lopez, Hyacinth Yennie, and Jackie Gorsky Mandyck

Stephen Balcanoff Award
Presented by: Abigail F. Williamson

Dinner

Kelly Styles S.T.E.M. 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 careers in 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 in Connecticut Children's Information Solutions department donated the funds to create the Kelly Styles S.T.E.M. Scholarship. The 2023 Kelly Styles S.T.E.M. Scholarships recipients are:



Ty'Laisha Huff

Ty'Laisha attends CREC Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts. She is student body president, participates in an anti-bullying group and earned a certificate in peer mediation. She plays volleyball and basketball, and serves on Mayor Bronin's Hartford Youth Advisory Board. Ty'Laisha plans to major in

nursing at UConn, perceiving this as a career that has true meaning. She has dreamed of becoming a nurse since age seven, after seeing the care provided when her grandmother was suffering from cancer.



Navita Budhoo

Navita attends Bulkeley High School. She is passionate about helping others, whether as a math tutor, on her school's senior committee, or playing volleyball. She is excited about a nursing career because it will enable her to help others every day, like her sister who is a nurse.

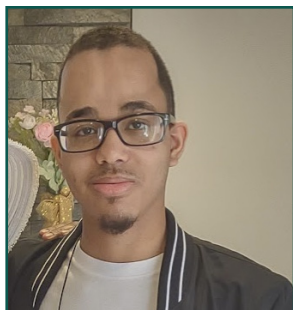
Ivan A. Backer Scholarship

The SINA / Ivan A. Backer Scholarship program was established in 1997 in honor of Ivan Backer, who served as founder and executive director 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 students as recipients of our 2023 Ivan A. Backer Scholarships.



Navita Budhoo

Navita is a student at Bulkeley High School. She is planning on attending Capital Community College to pursue a degree in Nursing. “Volunteering has led me to self-improvement, and confidence. Community Service has helped me find my purpose in assisting and enacting change in others.”



Antonio Monteiro Santos

Antonio is a student at Pathways Academy of Technology and Design. He plans to attend Full Sail University to major in Creative Writing BFA. “The little actions I can do impact people very greatly.”



Shinning Lovely Shar

Shinning is a student at Sport and Medical Sciences Academy. She plans to attend the UCONN Hartford campus to major in Communication. “Community service is my way of giving back to someone which makes me feel fulfilled and provides a purpose in my life.”

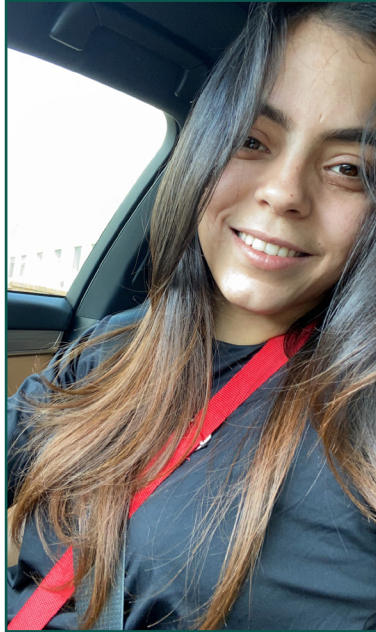
SINA Student Support Scholarship

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 2023 SINA Student Support Scholarship.



Leslie V. Padilla Martinez

Leslie Padilla is a senior at Capital Community College who will be a nurse at Hartford Hospital starting in July. A first-generation Mexican-American resident of Hartford, she attended Al Prince and became a licensed hairdresser. Then she decided “to be in a role where I can help people more. As a hairdresser I would listen to clients’ problems, but couldn’t do much more than hear them out.” That inspired her to become a nurse, as did her experience as a Latina. “In nursing, only 9% are Latinas. I want to add to that and work in community health.” She believes Hartford’s people of color often lack insurance and health-care education. She says “I don’t want to let my mom and my community down. I want to be an advocate”.



Luz. E. Berdecia

Luz Berdecia attends Capital Community College and maintains a 3.8 GPA while working as a medical assistant at Hartford Hospital and raising three children. She plans to become an APRN and has no doubt she will achieve her goals. She explains, “I’m very proud that even though I’m young and have children, everything I put my head into I achieve. I’ve been homeless with my kids and a newborn, but I found an apartment and a car. For me that was a big achievement, being able to do something in the middle of chaos, with no excuses.” She has worked since age 13 and says “this scholarship will take me much closer to completion and take some of the stress out” of school expenses.



Alondra D. Cotto

Alondra Cotto attends Capital Community College and 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. Alondra says, “I want to become a nurse because I want to help people”. She has been helping people all her life, starting with her mother, who has numerous medical issues. She adds, “I also want to become a nurse for the Hispanic and Latino community, because I know there are many people that struggle with the language”. She credits her parents and her advisor, Ms. Mitchell from Hartford Public Library. “She has always encouraged me and pushes me to continue my education.”



Judith Appah

Judith Appah studies nursing at Capital Community College while working as an account manager at a transportation company. She comes from Ghana, has two kids, volunteers at Connecticut Children's, and teaches Sunday school, explaining, "I just really do like children." She sees herself as a nurse manager someday, given her work experience. Judith credits her widowed mother as a role model for hard work, dedication and sacrifice, along with her brother, a pharmacist, who is "always striving, and always pushing me to do my best." She explains "he's a strong pillar who goes above and beyond. He's like a parent, which is appreciated, and does a lot for everyone. I feel really honored to be his sister, and honored to have this award, which will help me pursue my educational goals."

Neighborhood Service Awards

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



Dinora E. Lopez, Esq.

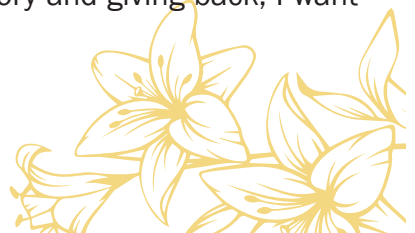
Dinora E. Lopez is Senior Vice President and Associate General Counsel at Liberty Bank, where she was recruited after working for years in local law firms, eventually becoming a partner. In her banking role, she contributes to the community by helping increase Liberty's philanthropy and by continuing to serve on boards of organizations that helped her, like Interval House and Capitol Community College.

The child of parents with drug and alcohol problems, and survivor of an early, abusive marriage, Dinora was forced to persevere.

When her parents divorced, she attended high school while managing the swim team and caring for her younger sister. Dinora had to reach out to community institutions for help with things like energy programs and scholarships, handling all the paperwork herself because her mother wasn't able.

Her husband, Jesus, originally met her through the swim team, but they didn't really connect until playing *Words With Friends* during college. He describes Dinora as "grounded, ambitious, and genuinely caring. She gives more than she has. She is my role model." Jesus explains that "being at the bottom, part of the system, and now contributing to the system, Dinora understands and has empathy. She's giving back, because she used to use the services." Dinora, in turn, gives "thanks to my husband, a great partner" and emphasizes that it is "very important to carefully partner in life".

When she was 18, Dinora's mother died, and figuring out "how to keep my sister out of the system" became her goal. This introduction to the legal system helped her realize "I can most certainly do this". After gaining custody of her 10 year old sister, Dinora spent a decade raising kids, working full time, and going to school. She attributes "my success to all the support I gained along the way. Through my story and giving back, I want to empower others".





Walden St. Juste

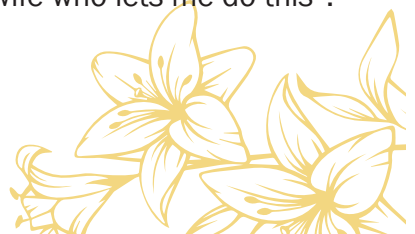
Walden St. Juste is a full-time paraprofessional for Hartford Public Schools who founded and runs CT Scholars, a nonprofit program to help kids play basketball while maintaining a focus on education. Walden is currently adding a trade school for youth working on their GEDs. Recently, he also opened Bros Dough Pizzeria, from which he donates food to youth 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. She explains “he never says no if someone is in need. He makes sure kids have uniforms, whether they have money or not.”

She emphasizes that Walden always insists on education; it is not only about basketball. Walden explains “I’m trying to teach kids that sports can take you so far”. He requires players to have teachers complete check-in, check-out sheets, so that kids stay on track academically.

Walden works with kids who have behavior issues and he’s often listed as an emergency contact for kids in his CT Scholars program. Hyacinth says parents call Walden for help when they are having trouble with their teenagers, knowing “he will find a way to smooth things over”. She describes him as “a magnet for goodness” and says “there are not a lot of these kinds of people around anymore”.

As a child in Haiti, Walden was “brought up to do community work”. Coming to Hartford for school, he couldn’t join traveling basketball for years, until he saved enough money to participate. This gave him the idea for CT Scholars, which charges much less and offers scholarships. Started in 2016, CT Scholars serves about 60 kids each year. Walden is proud of participants who have gone on to college and the armed forces, saying “the system works”. When asked how he juggles a fulltime job, running a nonprofit, adding a school and opening a restaurant, Walden explains “I have a wonderful wife who lets me do this”.





Andy Hart

Andy Hart is the longtime photographer for Hartford News. A history major in college, he didn't enjoy post-graduate education, so a friend suggested he write advertising copy. Andy worked at an ad agency, then as a reporter for the Glastonbury Citizen, before taking a sales job at Hartford News. There he found himself helping out, writing stories and taking photos. Andy discovered photography was "more fun than meetings", and realized he had found his calling.

"He is one of the best storytellers in Hartford, without using words", explains Jackie Mandyck, who nominated Andy for the

award. “He makes you fall in love with Hartford.” Andy says Hartford News is published with the “purpose of uniting ethnic and economic groups by geography”. As Jackie confirms, “Andy knows about everything, and all the events. He shows you Hartford through his lens.”

Growing up in Blue Hills, Andy says “we never went anywhere except downtown, and now I get to explore the whole city”. While he has lived around the region, Andy has been on Franklin Avenue for 30 years. He explains his passion for Hartford stems from the fact that “there are so many different cultures to explore here, which is great for photos, and I’ve gotten to know lots of people”.

Andy cites some photographic favorites, from the Peruvian parade for “Our Lady of Miracles”, to dragon boat races, to children’s theater productions. He particularly enjoys working for Riverfront Recapture, “getting to know the river and all its nooks and crannies”. When the Hartford News went digital in 2004, Andy turned over all his prints to the History Center at Hartford Public Library, laughing that “in the end, I became a historian after all. And now I have a memory on every street corner.”



Stephen Balcanoff Award

Each year SINA gives out an institutional award, known as the Stephen Balcanoff Award. The award honors long-time SINA board member Steve Balcanoff, who retired in 2020 after more than 40 years at Connecticut Children's. 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.



Serena Laws

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. Serena was nominated for her work on VITA, a tax preparation service that serves neighborhood and operates from Trinfo Café. Abigail (Abby) Williamson, PhD,

the associate professor who directs Trinity's Center for Hartford Engagement and Research, says "it's really remarkable what Serena has done, running the tax clinic in addition to her teaching and research. Even during COVID the service continued with a drop-off model, since neighborhood residents depend on receiving tax refunds."



"The safety net has shifted in the direction of tax credits, making it harder to get welfare", Serena explains. "However, you need to file tax returns to receive credits and refunds. The more I studied this, the more I realized it was an odd way to do transfers for social welfare." VITA has an IRS-funded curriculum that teaches volunteers how to prepare tax returns. Having experienced the training herself, Serena confirms "the quality is really good, and every single return is doublechecked. The students are smart, it's easy to train them, and VITA gives them contact with the community to help them understand concepts taught in class."

VITA helps students grasp "the fringe economy, where check cashing and tax return stores are concentrated in low-income places", says Serena. Abby emphasizes "the thing that's really meaningful is that this breaks with the Ivory Tower model of community engagement, using untrained undergrads. Instead, this is clearly serving a need for people who really rely on tax refunds. Working with VITA keeps them from having to go to predatory tax preparation services" that charge fees and keep part of the clients' refunds.

Realizing it was a “good model and the timing fits well into Spring semester”, Serena worked with United Way and The Village for Families and Children to create a pilot program five years ago at Trinfo Café, which had both the needed computer and neighborhood access. That first effort saw eight students file 161 returns, saving local residents \$35K in tax preparation fees and generating \$224K in tax refunds.

This year, 629 tax returns were filed for residents by 21 students at VITA, with \$138K avoided in fees for neighborhood families. Abby describes it as “a community partnership with real mutual benefits”. Serena says simply, “clients are really appreciative, and it’s a great way for students to connect with them. It’s nice when you get something that works”.



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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.



SOUTHSIDE INSTITUTIONS
NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE

207 Washington Street, Hartford, CT 06106

Phone: (860) 493-1618 | Fax: (860) 520-1359

www.sinainc.org