



Recognition • Education • Achievement • Community Health

*SINA's
19th Annual
REACH Awards
Ceremony*

Thursday, June 5, 2025

5:00 pm - 8:00 pm

**Hartford Hospital
Huebelin Hall in the ERC**

**560 Hudson Street,
Hartford, CT 06106**



PROGRAM

Masters of Ceremonies

Elizabeth Giannetta- Ramos
Program Director,
COMPASS Youth Collaborative

Carmen Diaz
Manager Customer Service Call Center / Guest Services
Hartford Hospital

Welcome

Logan Singerman
Executive Director,
SINA Inc.

David Fichandler
Vice President of Administration,
Hartford Hospital

Host Speaker

Bridgett Feagin
Executive Vice President and CFO,
Connecticut Children's

** Dinner **

Awards Presentation

Ivan A. Backer Scholarship
Presented by: Linda Torres and Carmen Diaz

SINA Student Support Scholarship
Presented by: Nancy Mendez

Stephen Balcanoff Award
Presented by: Chris Corcoran

Neighborhood Service Award
Presented by: Ben Dubow, Jose Figueroa, and Victor Cristofaro



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 2025 Ivan A. Backer Scholarships.



Bintu Mansaray

Bintu Mansaray is a student at Bulkeley High School planning to study Nursing at CCSU. Born in Africa, she has witnessed the challenges of limited healthcare access firsthand. An active member of her school and community, Bintu says, "Community involvement can change your opportunities and impact others." She is committed to using education and service to drive positive change.



Samuel Vinícius Xavier Gomes

Samuel is a student at Hartford Public High School who plans to pursue a degree in Biology, with the ultimate goal of becoming a doctor. Born in Brazil, he overcame poverty, a language barrier, and limited access to healthcare. "Helping others, even in small ways, became fulfilling," he says. "I learned that minor acts of kindness could significantly impact someone's life." Community service is part of his daily life, and he hopes to make healthcare more accessible for all.



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 CT State Capital Community College. SINA is delighted to celebrate the following recipients of our 2025 SINA Student Support Scholarship.

Robert Joseph Maura Jr.



Robert Joseph Maura Jr. is a biochemistry student in his fourth semester at Capital Community College in Hartford, CT. Originally interested in computer science, Robert says he switched after discovering “the complex cascades of information” in living systems, like how our bodies fight disease. In the lab, he quickly learned to operate sophisticated equipment and often helps class-

mates understand experiments and mentors them along.

Natali D. Collins, Medical Assistant at Hartford Healthcare, expressed that “His enthusiasm for biomedical science is infectious,” highlighting his gift for making challenging concepts understandable and engaging. Robert aspires to a career in toxicology or pharmacology, aiming to develop precise treatments. Inspired by mentors who fostered his curiosity, he is driven to “seed future scientific advancements.” With three courses remaining to complete his transfer ticket to Central Connecticut State University, where he will continue his promising academic journey.



Genesis Gabriela Mendez Rodriguez

Genesis Mendez Rodriguez is a dedicated and compassionate student at Capital Community College, pursuing a degree in Physical Therapy. Originally from Ecuador, Genesis arrived in the U.S. four years ago and has worked tirelessly to follow her passion for helping others. “I arrived in this country four years ago, and I’m so proud of myself for how far I’ve come,” she shared.

Inspired by her mother, a physical therapist who has worked with children with special needs for over 35 years, Genesis says, “My mom is my entire world. She inspired me to study this career.” Genesis studied physiotherapy in Ecuador for two years, gaining hands-on experience working with patients of all ages.

At Capital, she serves as a Student Ambassador and assists in the ESOL program, helping students overcome language barriers. “Genesis’s calm demeanor, strong work ethic, and compassion make her uniquely suited for physical therapy,” says her advisor James Rodriguez. Genesis’s dream is to help others regain independence and improve their quality of life.



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.



Esther Figueroa

When Esther Figueroa, Assistant Manager of the Healthy Homes Program at Connecticut Children's, learned she was receiving the 2025 Stephen Balcanoff Award, she was in disbelief. "I thought it was a prank," she laughed. But this wasn't a joke—it was long-overdue recognition for a woman who has spent more than 19 years quietly transforming lives across Hartford.

Esther is the heartbeat of Healthy Homes. With a background in accounting and an unwavering commitment to her community,

she blends precision with compassion—managing millions in grant funds with the same care she brings to every family she serves.

“Esther is a powerful force with an enormous heart,” says Chris Corcoran, Senior Manager at Connecticut Children’s. “She stretches every dollar, fights for every family, and inspires everyone around her.” Most recently, Esther helped secure a \$2 million HUD Healthy Homes Grant, bringing critical repairs to over 80 Hartford homes—addressing lead, mold, asbestos, etc.

To Esther, community is personal. “I was there once,” she says. “Our food came from WIC. Our gifts were from the Salvation Army. There’s no shame in any of it.” Her fierce advocacy has brought lead remediation to over 120 homes in Hartford’s North End. When water contamination threatened families, she called MDC and demanded action. The next day—they showed up. “I’m in there,” she says. “My heart is in there with you.”

Esther’s journey began nearly two decades ago as an administrative assistant. She took every opportunity to learn, eventually earning a promotion to Assistant Program Manager. “I never wanted to sit at a desk and say I hate my job,” she says. “That’s not me. I’m gonna move.”

“Esther is the heart of Healthy Homes,” Chris adds. “She’s not just holding the program together—she’s lifting it higher.”

Her work lives at the intersection of spreadsheets and soul. “I try my best,” she says. “The outcome may not always be what we want, but I’ll never stop trying.”





Neighborhood Service Awards

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



Mayra Rivera

Mayra Rodriguez is the General Manager of The Grocery on Broad at Forge City Works and was nominated for the 2025 Neighborhood Service Award by Ben Dubow, Executive Director at Forge City Works. He describes her as “a passionate, mission-driven problem solver” who has built a culture of dignity and respect at the market. Ben emphasizes how Mayra led the process of opening The Grocery on Broad—a neighborhood market that uses a fair-pricing model to ensure equitable and affordable access to wholesome foods—and continues to manage its day-to-day operations. “We would not have been able to open the grocery store without her,” he says. “The fact that it exists, and it exists at the quality that it does, is really to her credit.”

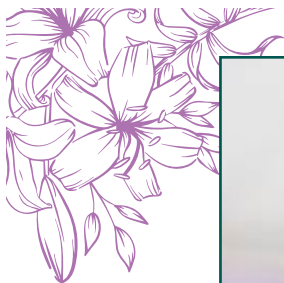
Mayra explains, “I’ve lived in this neighborhood most of my life. I know what it’s like to struggle, to want better, and to feel unseen. That’s why I do this work—to make sure no one feels left out.” Since opening, The Grocery on Broad has grown to over 1,000 registered members and serves more than 3,000 people in the community. Mayra’s commitment to the neighborhood shines through in her engagement with the community—whether she’s leading quarterly community meetings, connecting with seniors at local centers, or attending fairs to spread the word about the store.

According to Ben, Mayra’s leadership has been especially clear in challenging moments, like navigating delays in SNAP certification or communicating with customers about changes to the store’s discount model. “Her approach is always people first,” Ben says. “She’s built trust, and she listens. The way she engages with the community isn’t just a formality—it’s because she truly cares.”

Mayra sees her role as part of a larger mission to address food access and food security issues in the neighborhood. “It’s about making healthy food available in a way that feels respectful and welcoming,” she explains. “This work is personal for me. I care deeply about the people here, and I want to make sure they feel seen, heard, and valued.”

Ben sums up Mayra’s impact: “Mayra’s grown into a real leader—a strategic thinker, a problem solver, and a trusted voice in the neighborhood. She’s a huge reason why The Grocery on Broad is more than just a store—it’s a community resource and a source of hope.”





Enrique Sierra

“Everything I do, I do it because I want to—it comes from my heart,” says Enrique Sierra. For more than 20 years, Enrique has poured that heart into the families of Frog Hollow and Burns Latino Studies Academy. Whether leading afterschool programs, supporting attendance initiatives, or organizing joyful celebrations like the annual holiday parranda, Enrique has built a legacy rooted in relationships, trust, and love.

“He’s truly one of a kind,” says Jose Figueroa, Community School Director for The Village for Families and Children and Enrique’s colleague of over seven years. “He just wants to help. That’s the kind of person he is.” Jose recalls times Enrique drove across Hartford during the pandemic to deliver materials to students’ homes. “It wasn’t required—but that’s Enrique. He figures out what people need and makes it happen.”

Enrique understands that student success is deeply connected to family engagement. “If they trust you, they’re going to talk to you—and you’re going to better serve those families,” he explains. That’s why he’s often seen at dismissal chatting warmly with parents, or practicing Portuguese just to connect with new immigrant families.

His work extends far beyond school hours. He organizes community partnerships to provide food, coats, and gifts. He coaches baseball and softball, often volunteering his time. He’s a trusted figure to parents, a consistent support to students, and a joyful presence in every hallway.

“I’ve worked with a lot of people,” says Jose. “But I haven’t met anyone like Enrique.” He’s not one for the spotlight—but his impact is undeniable. As Enrique puts it: “Community means when people get together and help each other... because you belong there.” And Enrique has made sure everyone around him knows they belong.

Through his joy, advocacy, and relentless compassion, Enrique has helped transform Burns into more than a school—it’s a community hub, rooted in care and generational impact.





Jackie Nadal-Sanchez

Jackie Nadal-Sanchez is the kind of person who is always thinking about how to help others. Whether it's a family in need, a child who needs a coat, or a community event that needs an extra hand, Jackie is there—without being asked, without seeking credit.

Victor Cristofaro, principal of Burns Latino Studies Academy, shared, “Jackie is literally, 24/7, always thinking about how to help. She’ll text me at all hours—‘Hey, I have these clothes—can you use them for the families?’ Or, ‘I have some food—do you need it for the pantry?’ One weekend, she’s helping out with a

prom dress giveaway, the next she's organizing a toy drive. She's always doing something for someone, and it's impressive."

Her impact shows up in countless quiet moments. Victor recalls, "One year, we were short 100 toys for our Three Kings Day celebration. We were scrambling, trying to figure out how to cover the gap. And just like that, Jackie texts—'I've got 100 toys, do you need them?' She's the one making sure we have enough turkeys for Thanksgiving, enough school supplies for our kids, and enough warm coats for the families who need them most. The people who receive these things may never know it was Jackie, but she's the one making it happen."

For Jackie, it's simple. "Helping others just makes my heart happy. I want to make a difference, and I want my kids and my family to know that giving back matters—whether it's a bag of food, a warm coat, or just being there when someone needs you."

Victor sums it up perfectly: "Jackie is a role model. She's passionate, she's persevering, and she's always thinking about others. Seeing her honored this way is special—because we see you, Jackie. We see everything you do—and we're grateful."





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REACH is sponsored by SINA, Inc.
and its member institutions:
Connecticut Children's Medical Center,
Trinity College,
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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