

LATINO AMERICAN COMMISSION

ESTABLISHED IN 1972 | FALL 2016 NEWSLETTER | WWW.LATINOAC.NEBRASKA.GOV



Mission Statement: The mission of the Latino - American Commission is to serve as a voice in the Nebraska State Government for Latino Americans/ Latinos.

Vision Statement: The vision of the Latino - American Commission is to empower the Latino Community through a pro-active approach to issues that affect their access to educational, political, economical and social opportunities in Nebraska.

2016 Hispanic Heritage Month Commemoration

The 10th Annual Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration took place on Friday, October 7, at the Capitol Building in Lincoln.

The Commemoration, hosted by the Nebraska Latino American Commission (NLAC) was sponsored by McDonald's, Southeast Community College, U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo and community leader Jane Shanahan. The ceremony began in the Capitol second floor Rotunda at 3:30 p.m., the event concluded at 4:45 p.m.

The event observes Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 as Hispanic Heritage Month in Nebraska and recognizes students and community leaders for their role in helping the Latino population.

Six Nebraska students, four community leaders and one non-profit organization were honored for their impact on serving the Latino community.

NLAC Director Dr. Lazaro Spindola served as emcee and welcomed the audience of over 100 people to the Capitol Building. Porfirio Martinez, Deputy Consul representing the Consulate of Mexico, provided Opening Remarks in Spanish sharing the overall influence of Latin America to the United States.

Senator Patty Pansing Brooks (District 28) presented the State Proclamation observing Hispanic Heritage Month in Nebraska. She shared how important it was to be civically engaged by voting, contacting elected officials and running for office.

The Keynote Speaker this year is Griselda Aldrete, President and CEO of Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee. An alumni of the University of Nebraska-Omaha, she is a former investigative reporter and criminal justice instructor at Bryant and Stratton College and Concordia University. She is a current proponent of Latinos in corporate business, and serves on many boards promoting Latinos in Milwaukee. She was recently selected as a U.S. Delegate for the British American Project and named one of Wisconsin's top 48 most powerful Latinos.

Aldrete told the audience that everyone sitting before her, especially Millennials, had a duty to give back to their community, emphasizing to use their right to vote in November.

This was the fifth Commemoration where award recipients were nominated by the public.

Adrian Sanchez, Chair of the NLAC Board of Directors, presented the four awards: Lisa Guill received the Humanitarian Award for her commitment, leadership and volunteer work for the Latino and immigrant communities of Lincoln; Brenda Romero, Ph.D., Director-Spanish and Interpreting Program at the College of St. Mary in Omaha, received the Inspiration Award for helping Latina/o students succeed and instilling cultural pride; the Latino Employee Network of Union Pacific received the Organization Award for helping the Latino community and students of Omaha; and the Event Award was given to Jose and Linda Garcia of Omaha for educating the public about Dia de los Muertos / Day of the Dead with workshops, classes, exhibits and presentations for many years in Omaha.

The event concluded with the recognition of the winners of the Hispanic Heritage Month Essay Contest, which was open to all students in grades 6 to 12. As a theme, students were asked to write about the importance of civic engagement amongst themselves and the Latino community. The essays were judged by a diverse jury of 25 teachers, civil rights and community leaders from across the state.

Out of 149 entries from across the state, there were six winners in places first through third in high school and middle school.

The winners in the high school division were, from first through third place: Martin Ruiz of Lexington High School, Iliana Avalos of North Platte High School and Liz Lauby of Lexington High School.

In the middle school division, the winners were, from first through third place: Aaron Kutty of Omaha's Brownell-Talbot Middle School, Jimena Juarez of Lincoln's Mickle Middle School and Anirudh Mazumdar of Lincoln's Lux Middle School.

The first place winners read their essays to the audience at the ceremony, and their essays were published on McDonald's tray liners that were distributed to each McDonald's restaurant in the state. The winners also received scholarships, certificates, medals and Kindles.

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*Lazaro Arturo Spindola
NLAC Executive Director*

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A Message from the Executive Director

The Latino American Commission was created in 1972 to serve as a voice in the Nebraska State Government for the Latino population of Nebraska and to serve the Latino population of Nebraska. We continue to provide this service today and into the future.

Please joins us in congratulating the Latino/a candidates who engaged in the civic process and were voted to office: Tony Vargas will be the first Latino since Ray Aguilar elected to the Nebraska Legislature and he is the first Latino representative from South Omaha; Roger Garcia for Metropolitan Community College for Board of Governors, Dr. Larry Bradley for Papio Missouri River Natural Resources District Board of Directors, Linda A. Guzman-Gonzales for Western Community College Board of Governors, Amanda Ryan for Omaha Public Schools Board, Tony Gomez re-elected for Dakota County Commissioner and Mynor Hernandez for Schuyler Community Public Schools.

In addition, we join our friends at the Indian Affairs Commission in welcoming Tom Brewer, the first Native American, elected to the Nebraska Legislature. This is a victory for all of Nebraska and we look forward to working with them.

Please inform us if we have overlooked a Latino/a who has been elected.

We also congratulate and thank the Latinos/as who ran for office but not receive the majority votes needed to fill the office. Civic engagement is a wonderful aspect of the American society and we encourage you to try again. Our community needs you for inspiration. As we tell our children, if you did not succeed the first time, try again.

The Commission would like to thank the many volunteers and community organizations who registered voters, educated voters on the election process and helped these voters on Nov. 8th. There was a record number of Latino engagement for this election cycle and it could not have been accomplished without the community coming together to help each other.

The Presidential Election is the greatest example of democracy, and regardless of the outcome, everyone should be proud for participating in it and exercising the right to vote. Just keep in mind that those who are fighting for your rights have done so before the election and will continue afterward. You are not alone. As events unfold we will keep a watchful eye on potential threats and unjust treatment to the Latino Community.

President Obama will remain in office until January 2017, we will have a better understanding of the future by then. In the meantime, we are here to serve you, if you would like to contact us for information, to share your concerns, or just to talk; you are welcome to do so. We will take these concerns and discussions to the legislature, just as we have since 1972.

In addition, there are many organizations, groups, and community leaders around the state who are here to help you as well. Organizations such as Centro Hispano in Columbus, Unity in Action in South Sioux City, Hastings Multicultural Association, and the many in Omaha: Heartland Workers Center, Latino Center of the Midlands, Maya Ixim, MYLPA and the statewide organizations such as the NAACP, ACLU, Justice for our Neighbors, and Nebraska Appleseed, to name but a few who are here for you.

Remember, you are not alone. Not to mention the countless students organizations at every single college and school campus in Nebraska: Latino Leaders at Omaha Public Schools, Mexican American Student Association at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Creighton University's Latino Student Association, Hispanic Student Association at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, and this list does include the Latino sororities, fraternities and cultural organizations at each college campus, and the many educators, professors, social workers, community liaisons and counselors who work at these institutions whose purpose is to be there for you. If you have never spoken to them now, but would like to, they are all already ready with open arms.

If you have a concern, any concern, you are welcome to share it with us and with these community organizations. Remember, above all, you are not alone.

Dr. Lazaro Spindola
Executive Director – Latino American Commission

Hispanic Heritage Month High School Essay

Civic Engagement

By: Martin Ruiz, 12th Grade, Lexington High School

Civic engagement for young Hispanic people my age (16) is important. Ways young people like me can engage is through school, volunteering, and voting as soon as we turn 18. Being civically involved helps us young Hispanics gain leadership skills and have a voice in the community.

A good way to get involved at my age is school. During my middle school years, I never really saw the importance of being a good student. I never even thought about being involved in anything. My first experience in high school was Alternative Ed. I was there for one semester my eighth grade year getting high school credit because I fell a whole semester behind in school when I got expelled. Seeing the same kids in class not doing anything all morning made me want to do something to change who I was and where I was about two years ago. When I got out of Alternative Ed. and got away from all my drug-influenced peers, I came to Lexington High School with the determination to change.

My freshmen year I really pushed my education and got involved with my school. I know from personal experience that being active in the student body by joining extracurricular activities is a great way to be civically involved with the community. Seeing other Latino kids my age getting involved and being part of the community also made me want to get involved. Activities have kept me away from substance abuse and have given more purpose to my life.

I joined the school's Mock Trial team and played in the LHS Soccer Academy last year. I made new friends and built my character along the way. When I was participating in activities I felt better about myself because I knew I was doing something that was worth it. Joining activities at Lexington High School helps build leadership skills and recognition for the students involved. I noticed that we students feel really appreciated when we receive recognition for our involvement and work that we've done.

Volunteering is also a way that young Hispanics, like me, can civically engage. When I first wanted to get involved with my community, I volunteered by helping the youth league soccer team that my stepfather coaches. My stepfather still coaches and gets many people from the community involved in youth soccer. I find it interesting how he built such a good team and how many familiar faces from Lexington show up to watch the youth's league play.

Another form of volunteering is tutoring because it helps the younger generations see that there are older students getting involved with the community. When a student is being active in his community, he becomes a role model for younger generations. Another way to teach the younger generations is by volunteering to teach Religious Ed. Students who do so learn what it is like to be in the shoes of a teacher once every week. In other words, they are civically engaging and building their leadership skills while building the skills of the little children that take Religious Ed. Also volunteering with food banks helps individuals engage in something positive that makes a difference to others individuals. Voting is another example of civic engagement. Voting puts the voices of young Hispanic teenagers out there. In order to vote, the youth must stay informed with what is going on around

them in their communities. Staying informed with what is happening around the state and the world is an important task that civically involved people know how to do. Learning to stay informed helps youth know what to do next and what problems to fix when it is time to vote in elections. Young Hispanics will know what changes need to be made to better the environment for future generations.

Certainly the best part about being a young Hispanic who is civically involved is that it's a learning experience that will help us in the future. Involvement with school, community service, and voting will all be worth it later. Being a young Hispanic who is involved teaches individuals like me many useful life skills like leadership. Engaging with the community will help me later when I complete college and come back to my hometown. I hope to make changes and give back to the community by using what I've learned.



(Top to bottom) Lisa Guill with her Humanitarian Award, Chair Adrian Sanchez and HHM Committee Member Jani Martinez; LEN's Robert Natal and Rick Lichtas with their Organization Award; and Linda and Jose Garcia with their Event Award. (Top left to bottom) Grisela Aldrete; Martin Ruiz reads his essay; Aaron Kutty reads his essay with Cristina Castro-Matukewicz; and Dr. Brenda Romero with her Inspiration Award and Jani Martinez.

Hispanic Heritage Month Middle School Essay

Hispanic Heritage Month 2016

By: Aaron Kutty, 8th Grade, Brownell-Talbot Middle School

Civic engagement is working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference.

But what does that mean to you? To me it means protesting and rallying, voting for elected officials that you think best express your views, cultures and values.

When I think of civic engagement I think of working together to help understand everyone, from the smallest shopkeepers working in the corner of the community to the biggest company owners of big multiplex businesses and everyone in between. Working together to spread the knowledge, skills, values, and motivation throughout the community. If you are the person giving the advice or receiving it, you are helping create a more safe and lovable place for people to interact.

Some ways that I participate in civic engagement are attending speeches and rallies to learn and gain knowledge about elected officials. Another way I participate in civic engagement is encouraging people to vote. Most people don't vote because they don't want to, or they don't care.

If you don't vote you aren't taking part in civic engagement. That is one way you can participate in civic engagement even if you aren't old enough to vote. That ties in with learning and gaining knowledge about elected officials. If a person doesn't know anything about any of the elected officials, then he or she shouldn't vote. If you know a little bit about a candidate you can tell someone who doesn't and then they can make an intelligent choice.

I think that civic engagement is relevant and important to Hispanic Heritage Month because everyone, no matter who you are or where you come from, whatever language you speak or what religion you practice, everyone deserves to have a voice in the community that they are a part of.

I think some barriers that prevent Latinos/Latinas from becoming fully engaged are racism and exclusion. One of the biggest unresolved issues in the United States of America is racism. It is a huge barrier for Latinos/Latinas, Native Americans, African-Americans and many other groups of people. Many of these people face inequality issues including equal health care and equal jobs.

Exclusion is a barrier in the United States. The kind of exclusion the United States has is social exclusion. Social exclusion is the process in which individuals or people are systematically blocked from various rights, opportunities, and resources that are normally available to other people.

In conclusion, civic engagement can foster community participation and government involvement by implementing ideas, programs, and policies faster and more easily.

Latina Leader Honored in South Sioux City



The new sculpture honoring Tomasa Salas in South Sioux City. Photos courtesy of Johnathan Vodochodsky. Reprinted with permission.

The following information is from "Four honored for their advocacy at Sioux City ceremony" by Ian Richardson of the Sioux City Journal newspaper, reprinted with permission. To read the full article, visit: www.siouxcityjournal.com

The late Tomasa Guerra Salas was one of four community leaders to be recognized with a sculpture in October added to a collection honoring Siouxland's most dedicated lifelong community advocates.

The sculptures are part of the Celebrating Community Project, which is recognizing 13 local leaders who have dedicated their time advocating for the marginalized in Siouxland. Salas was chosen to represent the Latino community.

She had spent many years helping the Latino community, including the long hours spent translating and helping fellow Latinos overcome barriers within their communities. She died in 2013 at the age of 61.

"Her goal was to help our communities communicate with and understand each other so that there would be one less difference to divide us," said her daughter Natalie Atkins, who spoke on her mother's behalf during the unveiling ceremony in October.

Flora Lee, head of the Celebrating Community Project and local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said the project is meant to showcase heroism of local people.

"So often we always tell our children look for a mentor, look for a hero, and we look nationally, or on a world-wide level," she said. "We forget that we have local heroes and she-roses right here in our local community."

Salas' sculpture includes a plaque that reads: "Inspired by her mother to serve others before herself, Tomasa Salas lived and breathed her legacy with divine inspiration. Her compassionate gifts included interpretation services, transportation, nurturing birthing mothers, covering fees for others, encouraging healthy lifestyles and senior activities. Act without asking or expecting anything in return."

The sculptures are on public display at the Martin Luther King Transportation Center in South Sioux City.

'Mujeres' Art Exhibit Now On Display in Kearney

The "Mujeres" Art Exhibition is currently open at the Museum of Nebraska Art (MONA) in Kearney.

The exhibit, which translates to "Women," focuses on the work of five contemporary Latina artists with ties to Nebraska. The artists are: Claudia Alvarez, Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez, Linda Garcia-Perez, René A. Ledesma, and Sandra Williams.

"'Mujeres' is a vital exhibition to be held at MONA as it represents an ongoing commitment by the museum to continually explore what constitutes a Nebraska artist," writes MONA Curator Teliza Rodriguez. "The perspectives from these artists, distinctly feminine and distinctly Latino yet wholly American, further expand our ideas of this world and our communities."

Each artist grew up with different cultures and heritages, but share common themes of history, family, religion and spirituality, as well as finding a sense of place within the American landscape.

Artist Biographies:

* **Claudia Alvarez** was born in Mexico and raised in California, spending much of her childhood in the orchards and fields with her farmworker parents. Her drawings, paintings, and sculptures stem from an intersection of overlapping experiences and cultural identities as particularly impacted by pre-Colombian ceramics celebrating La Diosa Madre being a life-force of the Earth and cosmos.

* **Nancy Friedemann-Sanchez** is of dual citizenship, Colombian and the United States. Her recent installations and paintings explore identity, memory, and gender-weaving dialogues, passages, punctuations, and silences about hybridity and cultural ownership.

* **Linda Garcia-Perez**, a Nebraska native, her paper art was



"Meditation Vase #2" by René A. Ledesma, white stoneware and acrylic paint. Courtesy Photo.

greatly influenced by a trip to Mexico City in the 1970s. Exploring the market places, museums, and galleries, she saw the use of paper in Mexican folk art, sparking her curiosity which continues today with the processes, uses, and decorative value of this familiar resource utilized in creative ways.

* **René Ledesma's** love of Mexican folk art and all things handmade led her to utilize clay and papier-mâché partnering animal and human forms to tell stories with spiritual undertones. Her experiences with European cathedrals and historic Spanish missions in the southwest United States influenced her fearless use of color and form to fashion sculpture that heals the body and spirit.

* **Sandra Williams**, an artist residency with the Amazon Conservation Association in Peru challenged Williams to produce a series of cut paper based on indigenous folk tales. The Associate Professor of Art and Art History at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln features silhouettes of native plants and animals as well as Peruvian weaving.

Rodriguez sees a narrative within the artwork. She writes that each artist explores the space intersecting the themes for "Mujeres".

"Palpable narratives transpire within each artist's work that speak of intersections and connectivity," Rodriguez writes. "These intersections link the past and the present, family and society, femininity and masculinity, the natural world and the supernatural, Latino-culture and Anglo-culture, and humanity and the environment."

The exhibition will continue at MONA from October 2016 to Feb. 12, 2017. The Museum is located at 2401 Central Ave. in Kearney. Admission is free. For more information, call 308-865-8559; or visit: www.mona.unk.edu/mona/

Dora Lima Honored



NLAC Staff Assistant Dora Lima was recognized on October 20th for having worked at NLAC for 10 years. Lima was honored with a certificate and a commemorative cup awarded by Lt. Governor Mike Foley at a recognition ceremony. Lima has helped NLAC and the Latino community each day for all of those 10 years. She has also volunteered her time and services to local non-profits Nebraska Appleseed and El Centro de las Americas as an interpreter during tax season and providing a Spanish narration in educational labor rights videos. Congratulations, Dora!

Hispanic Heritage Month Proclamation 2016

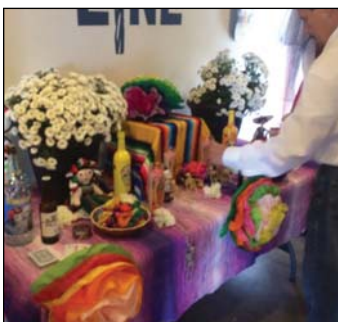


Gov. Pete Ricketts signed a Proclamation on Oct. 5th observing Sept. 15 to Oct. 15, 2016 as Hispanic Heritage Month in Nebraska. At the ceremony, from left to right: Lincoln Community Leader Elle Hansen, NLAC Public Information Officer Jasel Cantu, NLAC Staff Assistant Dora Lima, NLAC Executive Director Dr. Arturo Spindola and Gov. Ricketts.

2016 Dia de los Muertos Events in Nebraska



(Above) UNL's Mexican American Student Asc. held a celebration and fundraiser on Nov. 4th. (Top left to bottom) UNMC College of Public Health public ofrenda built by the Latino Advisory Committee. NLAC's Day of the Dead exhibit at the Capitol Building from Oct. 25-Nov. 5th. Rev. Sorensen presents at the Scottsbluff Guadalupe Center's Dia de los Muertos Penny Carnival on Nov. 5th. El Centro de las Americas' Director Romeo Guerra builds an ofrenda for the Day of the Dead exhibit and fundraiser at Zipline Brewery in Lincoln on Nov. 5th. (Bottom Left) Sioux City Public Museum Day of the Dead celebration on Oct. 30th. Photo by Ian Richardson/Sioux City Journal, reprinted with permission.



(Above) The Mexican Dance Academy of Nebraska performs at a Day of the Dead Art Expo in Omaha on Nov. 5th. Photo by Elite Studio Photography. (Top Right) Six Omaha Public Libraries built ofrendas overseen by Adrian Gómez Meza, from top to bottom: South Omaha Library ofrenda honoring Pets, the Charles B. Washington Library honoring musician Dr. Spit and Mondo we Langa, the Milton R. Abrahams Library honoring Milton R. Abrahams, the Bess Johnson Elkhorn Library honoring Anna Dewdney, the Florence Library honoring police officer Kerrie Orozco, and (below) the Millard Library honoring late Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel. (Below Left) A public presentation is given at the Consulado de Mexico en Omaha.



Upcoming Events

- **Holiday: December 25-26**
Christmas Day Observation
- **Holiday: January 1-2, 2017**
New Year's Day Observation
- **Session: January 4, 2017**
First Day of Nebraska Legislative Session
- **Ceremony: January 9, 2017**
Human Trafficking Month Proclamation
- **Meeting: January 14, 2017**
NLAC Winter Quarterly Meeting
- **Holiday: January 16, 2017**
Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday
- **Holiday: February 20, 2017**
President's Day
- **Holiday: April 28, 2017**
Arbor Day

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2016 Latino Summit in Kearney



On Oct. 24, NLAC and the Dept. of Education presented the 13th Annual Latino Summit to 600 Latino high school students. (Above) Seven students were the first to receive the Latino Summit Scholarship. (Left) Keynote Speaker Carlos Ojeda, Jr. explains the importance of speaking up and demanding an education. (Below Left) NLAC Director Spindola welcomes attendees to the Summit. (Below Right) Monica Mueller answers questions at the UNK recruitment table. (Bottom) At a session, UNK students share their stories and offer college advice.

