



Dave Heineman  
Governor

## STATE OF NEBRASKA

Latino American Commission  
Jasel Cantu  
Public Information Officer  
State Capitol Building P.O. Box 94965  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4965  
Phone: (402) 471-2791  
Fax: (402) 471-4381

For Release: Immediate  
Date: November 4, 2014

Media Contact: Jasel Cantu  
Phone: (402) 471-2791

### EIGHTH ANNUAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH STATE COMMEMORATION

LINCOLN – The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration took place on Friday, October 10, at the Capitol Building in Lincoln, Neb.

The Commemoration, hosted by the Nebraska Latino American Commission (NLAC) was sponsored by McDonald's, Southeast Community College, U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo and Humanities Nebraska, began with a ceremony in the Capitol second floor Rotunda at 3:30 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.

Chabella Guzman, Chair of the NLAC Board of Directors, gave the Welcome to the audience of 140 people. The new Consul of Mexico, Guadalupe Sanchez, provided Opening Remarks in both English and Spanish recommending a better understanding between the two nations and encouraging residents from both countries to be bilingual in one another's language.

Carl Eskridge, Lincoln City Council Chair, presented the Proclamation signed by Governor Dave Heineman to recognize Hispanic Heritage Month.

Six Nebraska students, two organizations and two community leaders were honored at this year's Commemoration. NLAC Director Dr. Lazaro Spindola served as emcee.

The Keynote Speaker was Cecilia Garcia-Akers, daughter of Latino civil rights leader Dr. Hector P. Garcia and founder of the Hector P. Garcia Memorial Foundation.

Dr. Garcia was a leader in civil and veterans rights, and the only nationally recognized Latino rights leader with a tie to Nebraska. Dr. Garcia completed his medical residency at Creighton University in Omaha after he was not accepted to any medical schools in Texas due to being a Mexican-American. After World War II, he began his lifetime career in public service including founding the American GI Forum, a national organization for veterans and veteran rights. Dr. Garcia was instrumental in repealing the poll tax, publicizing the working conditions of laborers and bringing awareness to discrimination among Latinos from the 1940s until his death in 1996. He was the first Mexican-American to be appointed ambassador to the United Nations and the first Mexican-American to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

"To honor my father: finish your education, be respectful to others, register to vote and go vote," she said.

Garcia-Akers received a standing ovation from the audience of students and community members.

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

Guzman presented the awards to the four recipients: Candida Kraska, a Spanish teacher at Millard West High School, has promoted Latino culture and heritage with her students, staff and



Dave Heineman  
Governor

## STATE OF NEBRASKA

Latino American Commission  
Jasel Cantu

*Public Information Officer*  
State Capitol Building P.O. Box 94965  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4965  
Phone: (402) 471-2791  
Fax: (402) 471-4381

community including founding a student organization, was given the Inspiration Award. Ismael Valadez, a community activist from South Sioux City, was awarded the Humanitarian Award for having spent years giving back to the community and helping Latino youth. The Event Award was given to the Sheldon Museum of Art in Lincoln for their *Dia de los Muertos Family Day* event that is family-friendly, educational and open to the public. The non-profit, OneWorld Health Community Center of Omaha, was granted the Organization Award for providing health care, dental care, childcare and English classes to thousands of community members for the past several decades. In 2013, they served 27,000 patients.

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. The essays were judged by a blind jury of 13 teachers, businessmen, and community leaders from across the state. As a theme, students were asked to select one of two quotes by influential Latino leaders Jaime Escalante and Frida Kahlo, share their opinion on the quote and how it relates to them.

The first place winners were invited to read their essay to the audience.

Out of nearly 260 entries, the winners in the high school division were, from first through third place: Helen Guadalupe Martinez of Harry A. Burke High School in Omaha, Maria Ruiz of Lexington High School, and Nikki Yablonski also of Harry A. Burke High School.

“Frida Kahlo’s words have influenced me in accepting myself for who I am and where I come from. Digging back through my Hispanic roots I’ve come to see that my heritage and culture has helped develop the United States of what it is today, a melting pot of different cultures and ideas building one nation as a whole. What would the U.S. be without Hispanic diffusion? Will it still function? My heritage and culture has shaped me to the strong independent person I am today,” wrote Martinez.

In the middle school division, the winners were, from first through third place: Jacquelin Grado of Schuyler Middle School, Alexis Chytil of Morton Magnet Middle School in Omaha and Laura Liu of Brownell-Talbot Middle School of Omaha.

“If someone tells me, ‘your dream is too hard to achieve.’ Then I’ll say, ‘That’s the point of having a dream, you have to work hard for it.’ I will have to work hard for something I want. Everybody has to. If you aren’t working hard, then what are you achieving? Nothing, that’s what,” wrote Grado.

Each essay is available in its entirety on the Commission website at [www.latinoac.nebraska.gov/](http://www.latinoac.nebraska.gov/).

For those interesting in joining the Hispanic Heritage Month Planning Committee, please contact the Latino American Commission at 402-471-2791.

###

*Note: Photos Available.*