



# EL OBSERVADOR

## Mentoring Hispanic Youths to Succeed

By Joy Ramos  
The Portland Observer

Raquel Aguillon, a youth education advocate for Multnomah County recently attended a business luncheon at Portland's Convention Center on Thursday, Oct. 5 with three high school Latinas as guests of honor. The annual event was a mixed gathering of 700 statewide dignitaries and entrepreneurs along with representatives from government agencies and corporations supporting minority enterprise development. For the students, it challenged their cultural stereotype of businesses run only by men, especially after being exposed to many successful women entrepreneurs.

Aguillon's focus has been to help Hispanic youths succeed in school and create meaningful ties with their community. She gets directly involved with them at the Family Resource Center within the Clara Vista Apartments where Multnomah County has a satellite office there. Through a partnership between Multnomah County and the Hacienda Community Development of the apartment complex, social service

resources like youth advocacy, healthcare, violence prevention and counseling are made available to the residents.

As a way to engage kids in community involvement, Aguillon led members of the Urban Latino Youth program to do the remodeling work on an old room within the Clara Vista Apartments. They all worked together by installing the carpeting and doing the necessary paint-work. To give the room an artistic finish, the kids commissioned an artist to paint a mural on the wall by using \$3500 in grant funds from the Regional Arts Council, applied for by Aguillon and Volunteers of America. "I'm very inspired by the dedication of all of the students and the number of hours that they had put in. It's a beautiful mural of a tropical beach area," expressed Aguillon.

Following the success of their last community project, the Urban Latino Youth will again be placing another mural within the complex.

Helping Hispanic youths do well in school was a need met by Multnomah County through their

Homework Club. It has been offered as an after-school resource for the last eight years. Students can meet

with Aguillon aided by a team of tutors, mostly from local colleges and Grant High School in the Clara Vista

Apartment's Baltazar Ortiz Community Center. "It is wonderful to see students participating on a regular

basis. I believe that they do much better in school because of the Homework Club," explained Aguillon. Tutoring is available every Monday, Wednesday or Thursday from 4-5 p.m. An average of 15-20 students usually attend as drop-ins or regulars.

Aguillon commented on her extensive work as a youth advocate over the years has been personally and professionally rewarding. "We at Multnomah County are so appreciative of the people, organizations and businesses that support the work we do with Hispanic youths."

An upcoming program called Unicas Somos Unidas, translated as we are unique; we are united, is in the works, headed by Aguillon, under the direction of Multnomah County. It will conceptually be an after-school program for young Latinas from Gregory Heights Middle School in Northeast Portland. Their idea is to give the girls a chance to openly explore different developmental issues involving such things as their image, presentation and appearance. Plans are for regular meetings of every other week from 4-5 p.m.



Brenda Reyes (from left), Imelda Reyes and Nancy Robles are high school Latinas with an interest in business. As part of the Bienestar program by Multnomah County at the Clara Vista Apartments, they were treated to a luncheon at the Convention Center where minority-owned entrepreneurs were honored.

## Linfield Student Earns Gates Millennium Scholarship

Laura Vázquez was eight when she moved to the United States from Mexico. She spoke no English.

Today, as a sophomore at Linfield College, she is fluent in three languages—Spanish, English and German—and was recently awarded a Gates Millennium

Scholarship from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The Gates Millennium Scholars Program, administered by the United Negro College Fund, provides scholarships and fellowships for minority students. Awards supplement existing financial aid and elimi-

nate the need for scholars to borrow money or spend excessive time at jobs, both of which can be a barrier to completing a college degree. In its first year, the foundation awarded 4,000 scholarships to students across the nation.

Vázquez's academic success is due in

large part to the foresight of her parents, Lupe and Maria Vázquez of Hood River.

Vázquez said her mother, who has worked in the kitchen at Wy'East Middle School in Odell for the past four years, helped Vázquez and her two brothers in their transition to the United States. She

volunteered at their elementary school and helped her children in their English as a second language classes.

Education has always been a priority for the Vázquez family. As a junior at Hood River High School, Vázquez studied in Germany.

## Is Mexico Asking the Right Questions?

By Jacob G. Hornberger for The Portland Observer

In order to solve a problem, it is necessary to ask the right questions. During his recent visit to Washington, Mexican President-elect Vicente Fox asked the wrong questions: "How can we narrow the gap in income on both sides of the border?" and "How can we put together a fund for development?"

The questions that Fox should ask instead are: What are the causes of poverty? What are the causes of wealth? Why have the Mexican people always had a lower standard of living than Americans?

Could the reason be that Mexicans have a different history and culture? Perhaps, but the American Southwest shares much of the same history and culture, since it was once part of Mexico.

Could the reason lie with natural resources? Perhaps, but everyone knows that Mexico has been blessed with enormous reserves of petroleum.

Could education explain the disparities of income and wealth? Perhaps, but in Mexico, as in the United States, the state has established a system of free education for all children in the country.

The real reason for the wealth and poverty of a nation is not a comfortable one for Fox or any other Mexican politician or bureaucrat, which is the primary reason that they would rather not discuss it. The reason for the relative poverty of the Mexican people lies with the Mexican government itself or, more specifically, with the economic system under which the Mexican people have suffered for many decades.

Mexico's economic system is a combination of mercantilism, socialism, and fascism, all wrapped into one

dirty little package, a package that for decades has provided the means by which Mexican public officials have plundered and looted the Mexican people through taxes, licensing fees, permits, regulatory fines, and, of course, good old-fashioned corrupt bribes commonly known as *mordidas*.

In Mexico, the state is everywhere and taxes and controls everything. And it's all justified by cradle-to-grave government welfare and regulatory programs, such as old-age assistance, health care, public education, and occupational licensure.

Thus, the reason Mexico is poor has nothing to do with history, culture, resources or education. Mexico is poor because for more than 175 years, the Mexican government has had the power to combat poverty and "help the people" with its bureaucracies, agencies, taxes, welfare and regulation.

## The Racial Wealth Gap: Left Out of the Boom

The U.S. Census Bureau trumpets rising incomes in today's upbeat release. For African-American and Hispanic families, however, the news is not so cheery. Black median household income (\$25,351) did not rise from 1997 and 1998, despite the booming economy. Hispanic median household income rose 4.8%, but only to \$28,330, just 58% of the white median.

One piece of good news from today's Census release, that Hispanic poverty rates have fallen, does not mean that these families are financially secure. At about 26%, African-American and Hispanic poverty rates are more than three times higher than the white rate of 8%. The gap in wealth between white families and black or Hispanic families remains huge. The percentage of black or Hispanic households with zero or negative net worth (greater debt than assets) is twice as high as for white households.

Access to homeownership, long seen as the key to achieving the American dream, is still restricted for black and Hispanic families because of employment, housing, lending and other discrimination. Their rate of homeownership is only about two-thirds the rate for white households.

"To have a sense of economic security, families need savings to fall back on during hard times and investments for retirement," said Chuck Collins, co-director of United for a Fair Economy.



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