

HISPANIC HERITAGE FOUNDATIONâ€™S YOUTH AWARDS TO HONOR 18 RIO GRANDE VALLEY-AREA HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS FOR THEIR LEADERSHIP IN THE CLASSROOM AND COMMUNITY

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Edinburg, TX – The Hispanic Heritage Foundation (HHF) recently announced the recipients of the Rio Grande Valley Regional Hispanic Heritage Youth Awards (see names below). Eighteen local high school seniors will be honored for their leadership in the classroom and community during a ceremony at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley | Edinburg Campus | Student Union Theater, 1201 West University Dr. Edinburg, Texas 78539. In commemoration of the 17th anniversary of the Youth Awards, the ceremony will spotlight past Youth Awardees with special guests in attendance. To follow the Youth Awards Ceremony online, use the hashtag #YA15.

For the first time, the Hispanic Heritage Foundation expanded its Youth Awards to include the South Texas region. With over 1,200 applications submitted, this newly added region provided HHF with its largest response both nationwide and in the history of the Youth Awards.

The Youth Awardees will receive grants for their education, or to fund an idea or community project to encourage “actionable leadership,” which is HHF’s call to action. Recipients will then be mentored by past Youth Awardees as they prepare to attend college and into their careers through HHF’s award-winning Latinos On Fast Track (LOFT) workforce development program. The Youth Awards are taking place in 11 regions across the country with 216 Youth Awardees selected from thousands of applicants. The average GPA for selected students is nearly a 4.0.

“We are thrilled to honor yet another class of outstanding young Latino leaders from Rio Grande Valley who will certainly make an impact on our communities and workforce as they move forward in their careers,” said Antonio Tijerino, President and CEO, HHF. “We also applaud the vision of our sponsors as they share our focus in supporting what we consider priority fields for America. We believe these are the young leaders of today, not tomorrow and frankly, we can’t afford to wait. I will say that after 17 years of Youth Awards, there is no shortage of top, young, Latino talent.”

One of the 18 recipients will receive a special **Leadership** recognition by the United States Marines Corps for their leadership in the classroom and community. As a United States Marine, you must be able to “lead by example” and “make sound and timely decisions.” The student chosen exemplifies those qualities by maintaining a 3.50 minimum GPA while balancing extracurricular activities and inspiring others.

The Hispanic Heritage Foundation (HHF) will also recognize a teacher with the **Hispanic Heritage Innovative Educator Award**, sponsored by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence, for his or her achievements throughout their professional career.

After the regional ceremonies, the 216 Regional Youth Awards recipients will be narrowed to one National Youth Award recipient for each of the six categories and celebrated at the National Youth Awards presentation along with celebrities who are recognized for being role models. National Awardees will also receive a laptop computer and all-expense-paid trip to the ceremony (location TBD).

Additional sponsors of the Youth Awards include Direct Auto Insurance, UPS, and Crowell & Moring LLP. National

partners include: Macy's, The Raben Group, Saber Es Poder, and NCURA. HHF also partners with thousands of high schools, colleges, community organizations, media outlets and business partners on the program.

2015 Rio Grande Valley Regional Hispanic Heritage Youth Awards Recipients:

Business & Entrepreneurship, sponsored by BBVA Compass:

Gold: Juan Castillo, South Texas BETA, Edinburg, TX

Silver: Andrea Morales, Veterans Memorial Early College High School, Brownsville, TX

Bronze: Joana Benavides, United South High School, Laredo, TX

Community Service, sponsored by Colgate Palmolive:

Gold: Natalie Coleman, Lyndon B. Johnson, Laredo, TX

Silver: Natasha Stark, Richard King High School, Corpus Christi, TX

Bronze: Sofia Cortez Padilla, Sharyland High School, Mission, TX

Education, sponsored by Southwest Airlines (Official Airlines of the Youth Awards):

Gold: Citlaly Mendoza, Johnny G. Economedes High School, Edinburg, TX

Silver: Gelsey Castorena, South Texas Business, Education and Technology Academy, Edinburg, TX

Bronze: Jimena Gamboa, Santa Maria High School, Santa Maria, TX

Engineering & Mathematics, sponsored by ExxonMobil:

Gold: Jessica Zamarripa, Thomas Jefferson T-STEM ECHS, Pharr, TX

Silver: Anthony Garcia, Harlingen High School South, Harlingen, TX

Bronze: Tabitha Uranga, Jimmy Carter Early College High School, La Joya, TX

Healthcare Science, sponsored by CVS Health:

Gold: Javier Granados, Foy H. Moody High School, Corpus Christi, TX

Silver: Devanira Verdeia, PSIA Memorial Early College High School, San Juan, TX

Bronze: Daniel Diaz, Brownsville Lopez Early College High School, Brownsville, TX

Innovation & Technology, sponsored by Entertainment Software Association:

Gold: Aleida Olvera, Veterans Memorial Early College High School, Brownsville, TX

Silver: Nina Martinez, Johnny G. Economedes High School, Edinburg, TX

Bronze: Mirna Escalera, Lyndon B. Johnson High School, Laredo, TX

About Hispanic Heritage Foundation

Established by the White House in 1987, the Hispanic Heritage Foundation inspires, identifies, prepares and positions Latino leaders in the classroom, community and workforce to meet America's priorities as well as promote cultural pride, accomplishment and the great promise of Latinos. HHF is a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit organization and all support is tax deductible. Visit www.hispanicheritage.org. Follow HHF on Facebook at [facebook.com/hispanicheritage](https://www.facebook.com/hispanicheritage); and on Twitter at [@HHFoundation](https://twitter.com/HHFoundation).

The Youth Awards is the beginning of HHF's "Actionable Leadership" cycle as Youth Awardees and other students are tracked, prepped and connected through the Latinos On Fast Track (LOFT) program as they transition from high school, to college and grad school, and into their careers. Through LOFT, students and young professionals take part in leadership trainings, industry-tailored symposia and workshops; connected and mentored through a network of tens of thousands (aged 17-30); and placed in hundreds of internships, mentorships, fellowships and full-time positions. To join the LOFT Network visit <http://loftnetwork.org> or www.loftinnovation.org.

ABOUT UTRGV

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley was created by the Texas Legislature in 2013 in a historic move that combines the resources and assets of UT Brownsville, UT Pan American and the Regional Academic Health Center. This makes it possible for residents of the Rio Grande Valley to benefit, for the first time, from the Permanent University Fund, a public endowment contributing support to eligible institutions of The University of Texas System and the Texas A&M University System. UTRGV also will be home to a School of Medicine and will transform Texas and the nation by becoming a leader in student success, teaching, research and health care. UTRGV enrolled its first class Aug. 31, 2015, and the School of Medicine is scheduled to open in fall 2016.

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