

## PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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### **HISPANIC HERITAGE YOUTH AWARDS TO HONOR AND PRESENT 21 MIAMI-AREA HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS WITH MORE THAN A HALF MILLION DOLLARS IN GRANTS FOR LEADERSHIP IN CLASSROOM AND COMMUNITY**

*University of Miami to Host Ceremony – Local Students Eligible for National Award and Travel to Washington, DC*

WASHINGTON, DC—The Hispanic Heritage Foundation (HHF) today announced the recipients of the Miami Regional Hispanic Heritage Youth Awards (HHYA). Twenty-one local high school seniors, and one teacher, will be honored for their leadership in the classroom and community and promoted as role models for their peers during a ceremony at the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School on May 6.

The 2008 Miami Youth Awardees will each receive educational grants in the amounts of \$3,000 for Gold Medallion, \$2,000 for Silver Medallion and \$1,000 for Bronze Medallion Awardees. The Teacher Award, presented by Staples Foundation for Learning, will recognize a teacher that has made a significant impact on the lives of students and will be announced at the Awards ceremony.

In 12 regions across the country, 252 Youth Awardees will receive more than \$500,000 in total grants after being selected from an original pool of thousands of applications. The Miami Regional Youth Award recipients are:

**Academic Excellence**, for extraordinary academic achievement, presented by the Sprint Foundation:

**Emilio Lopez** of Miami, Florida – Coral Gables High School - Gold Medallion  
**Alyssa Prats** of Weston, Florida – Cypress Bay High School- Silver Medallion  
**Jacqueline Victoria Ros** of Weston, Florida – St. Thomas Aquinas High School - Bronze Medallion

**Business**, for strong business aptitude, sponsored by the National Society of Hispanic MBAs:

**Alexandra Cecilia Jerez-Fernandez** of Weston, Florida - Cypress Bay High School - Gold Medallion  
**Laura Veronica Rendon** of Davie, Florida – Coral Springs High School - Silver Medallion  
**Diandra Isabelle Fermin** of Hialeah Gardens, Florida – Coral Gables Senior High School - Bronze Medallion

**Education**, for demonstrated desire to be among the next generation of teachers, sponsored by Southwest Airlines (also the Official Airline of the HHYA):

**Jancarlo Perez** of Miami, Florida – Miami Coral Park Senior High School - Gold Medallion  
**Christine Hazday** of Winter Park, Florida – Trinity Preparatory - Silver Medallion  
**Diana Estrada** of Hialeah, Florida – Master Academy Charter High School - Bronze Medallion

**Engineering and Mathematics**, for innovation in mathematics, engineering, or technology, sponsored by ExxonMobil:

**Mike Valdes** of Hialeah, Florida – School for the Advanced Studies - Gold Medallion  
**Brigitte Marie Morales** of Miami, Florida – Miami Coral Park Senior High - Silver Medallion  
**Maria Pena** of Plantation, Florida – College Academy at BCC - Bronze Medallion

**Journalism**, for creativity and integrity in print, broadcast, or web-based media, sponsored by NBC Universal/Telemundo:

**Rafaella Bican-Debest** of Miami, Florida – Coral Reef High School - Gold Medallion  
**Anna Victoria Salinas** of Sarasota, Florida – Pine View School - Silver Medallion  
**Amanda Nicole Labora** of Miami, Florida – MAST Academy - Bronze Medallion

**Leadership**, for excellent leadership skills in the classroom and community, sponsored by Sallie Mae (also the Official Student Loan Partner of the HHYA):

**Veronica Barroso** of Miami, Florida – G. Holmes Braddock Senior High School - Gold Medallion  
**Rebecca Marie Espinosa** of Miami, Florida – Coral Reef Senior High School - Silver Medallion  
**Sara Plana** of Oakland Park, Florida – Boca Raton Community High School - Bronze Medallion

**Sports**, for athletic prowess and sportsmanship, sponsored by SUBWAY® Restaurants:

**Sara Louise Egozi** of Miami, Florida – Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School - Gold Medallion  
**Diego Arango** of Weston, Florida – Cypress Bay High School - Silver Medallion  
**Rachel J. Fernandez** of Miami, Florida – Westminster Christian School - Bronze Medallion

Regional committees select Awardees from the thousands of applications submitted by graduating high school seniors of Hispanic descent. Selection criteria include academic achievement, community service, and category focus.

"We are so proud of the Youth Awards program, which is progressing by leaps and bounds with more sponsor involvement, celebrity participation, and most importantly, student recognition." said José Antonio Tijerino, President and CEO of the Hispanic Heritage Foundation. "The Miami

Awardees are role models and leaders who excel inside and outside of the classroom. They and their fellow regional honorees represent the next generation of emerging Hispanic professionals, and we are committed to providing them with opportunity and support."

"The students being honored are an inspiration to us all," said actor Wilmer Valderrama, Official Spokesperson of the 2008 Hispanic Heritage Youth Awards and *Inspira* Award Recipient. "These young leaders are setting a positive example not only for the Hispanic community, but for people throughout the country. The determination, generosity of spirit, and accomplishment they have demonstrated at such young ages are only a small fraction of what they will eventually go on to achieve, and I applaud their hard work."

The success of the Youth Awards program is predicated by the support of thousands of high schools, community organizations, and business partners. In addition to the category sponsors listed above, the *Inspira* Award is presented by Hershey's. Official Sponsors of the Hispanic Heritage Youth Awards include Allianz Life, Hilton Hotels Corporation, Sallie Mae, Southwest Airlines, Target, and Wachovia. Youth Award Partners include the Hispanic College Fund, *VMe*, and Voto Latino. Hispanic Heritage Foundation Partners and Sponsors include Home Builders Institute, National Association of Home Builders, Lowe's, the National Research Center for College and University Admissions (NRCCUA), Pulte Homes, Sprint Foundation, and UPS.

After the local ceremonies, the 252 Regional Youth Awards recipients will be narrowed to one National Youth Award recipient for each of the seven categories. Those individuals will be honored at the National Youth Awards presentation, where each student will receive an additional \$5,000 educational grant and a laptop computer. The National Youth Awardees will be then be presented with their award onstage during a special ceremony of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Hispanic Heritage Awards in Washington, DC on October 9, 2008.

#### **About the Hispanic Heritage Youth Awards**

The Hispanic Heritage Youth Awards were created to identify and promote the next generation of role models by celebrating their accomplishments in the classroom and community. These young leaders are promoted as role models for their peers. With the Youth Awards as a feeder program, the LOFT (Latinos on Fast Track) initiative was launched in 2004 to systematically develop sustainable relationships between top Hispanic young professionals who have been awarded and America's workforce.

The Hispanic Heritage Foundation, a 501c3 not-for-profit organization, identifies, prepares, and positions Latino leaders in the community, classroom and workforce through national cultural, educational, and career development programs. For more information about the Hispanic Heritage Foundation, please visit [www.HispanicHeritage.org](http://www.HispanicHeritage.org).

**NOTE: To sponsor the Hispanic Heritage Youth Awards and other Hispanic Heritage Foundation programs please call 202.861.9797.**