

2014

LaRaza  
mujeres   
**DESTACADAS**



Celebrating the extraordinary women who  
are making a difference in our communities



# *¡Felicidades a las Mujeres Destacadas del 2014!*

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The PrivateBank le gustaría felicitar a las Mujeres Destacadas de este año. Cada una de ustedes se ha distinguido en su profesión y en su comunidad. **¡Felicidades!**



# ¡Bienvenidas!

## Jimena Catarivas Corbett

General Manager, La Raza Newspaper



On behalf of La Raza and impreMedia, it is my pleasure to welcome you to our annual Mujeres Destacadas Awards Ceremony. We are thrilled that this year impreMedia has extended this event to all of our local communities including Los Angeles, New York, Houston, Chicago, San Francisco and Orlando.

Today, we celebrate a group of extraordinary Latinas who have committed themselves to the service of others. While they appear as diverse as our Latino family, they have one thing in common – their unselfish determination to make a difference in the lives of others. These women have distinguished themselves by their contributions to the areas of Health, Education, Business and Technology, the Arts and Community Leadership.

The principle that a single person can make a difference is at the heart of the Mujeres Destacadas Awards and today's event is an opportunity to publicly say "Gracias" to these extraordinary local heroes. Our most heartfelt thanks to the many sponsors who have joined us in today's tribute and for having the vision to support these grass root efforts. We couldn't have done it without you!

Mujeres, we salute you, we are proud of all you do, and we thank you for your tireless work.

Congratulations!

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4th Annual

AWARDS LUNCHEON

Thursday, April 10th, 2014  
The Intercontinental Hotel Chicago

PROGRAM SCHEDULE:

Welcome  
*Jimena Catarivas Corbett*

Presentation of Proclamation from Governor Pat Quinn  
*Javier Salas, Sr. Advisor, Office of Governor Pat Quinn*

Remarks from The Private Bank

Keynote Speaker  
*Letty Vélez*

Presentation of Awards to La Raza's 10 Mujeres Destacadas

Presentation of Scholarship

Closing Remarks



## Leticia Vélez

President and CEO, Chicago Minibus Travel



Leticia Vélez is a relationship driven and proven entrepreneur who believes in creating value for her business stakeholders and community partners. During her business career, Ms. Vélez has created, led and managed Chicago Mini Bus Travel, Vélez Enterprises, Vélez Energy.

As President and CEO of Chicago Minibus Travel, she is driven by providing clients a partnerships for safe, reliable and affordable transportation. Vélez Enterprises facilitates the formation of critical solutions for entrepreneurs, organizations and non-profits and Vélez Energy, founded in 2014, will focus on clean energy solution and will be fully operational by late 2014.

She is not just a savvy business leader but also committed to philanthropic ventures for her community, donating her resources and time to charitable organizations and working alongside her team of employees for various causes. Additionally, Leticia values “Sharing it Forward” thru mentorship and connecting people.

Ms. Vélez credits the relationships she has built through these organizations for contributing to and supporting her success and growth. She founded the “Chicago’s Golden Circle” which includes alumni of Goldman Sachs’ 10,000 Small Business Programs.

Ms. Vélez is/has been a member of many national, regional and local organizations including:

- Women Impacting Public Policy
- Latino Coalition
- Enterprising Women Magazine
- National Latina Business Women Association
- World Business Chicago: Strategy 10 Initiative Committee

Her accomplishments also include many awards, such as:

- 2010 IL State Treasury “Woman on the Rise” Award Honoree
- 2012 La Raza “Mujeres Destacadas” Award Honoree
- 2012 Alum of the Goldman Sachs “10,000 Small Businesses Program” selected for global commercial recognition
- 2014 United States Chamber of Commerce Blue Ribbon Award Winner

# Thank you to our 2014 Judging Committee

A special thanks to our 2014 judging committee, comprised of industry leaders from five different categories and a department chair from La Raza



Omar Duque, CEO  
 Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce



Maria Pesqueira, CEO  
 Mujeres Latinas en Acción



Andrew Sund, President  
 St. Augustine College



Elizabeth Colon, CEO  
 Metaphrasis and 2012 Mujer Destacada



Azucena Vega  
 Artist and 2011 Mujer Destacada



Raiza Mendoza, Manager of Hispanic Affairs  
 Gift of Hope and 2012 Mujer Destacada

## Congratulations to the 2014 Mujeres Destacadas

We are proud to honor 10 extraordinary women who are making a positive difference in our community by recognizing them as "Mujeres Destacadas" for their contributions in the areas of Health, Education, Community Leadership, Business and Technology and Arts/Culture.



## MISTRESS OF CEREMONY

# Leda Santodomingo

Journalist

Leda Santodomingo has been a journalist for more than 30 years, with experience in television, radio and print media. She has worked not only in Chicago and her native Venezuela but also in California, Miami and many other Latin American countries.

Over the course of her distinguished career, she has received many awards including an Emmy from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in recognition of 25 years+ service to the industry and was inducted into the prestigious Silver Circle of Chicago's television journalists.

In 2010 Leda decided to spread her wings and start her own production company, Leda Santodomingo Productions, Inc. Currently, Leda is producing a half-hour television show for "Gift of Hope" and also as part of her new project "Cuando sea Grande" she writes a weekly syndicated column for La Raza, has a weekly radio segment in 750 Am with Vicente Serrano, in Sin Censura and a the monologue dedicated to the grown up people la "Gente Grande".





**Laura Müller**  
**Founder, Las Recetas de Laura**

***In September 2011, Laura Müller taped a video for her friends at the Mexican consulate, explaining how she prepared fried eggs in water.***

“During my last trip we had cooked them, but they forgot. I didn’t want to be reminding them how to make them every five minutes, so I decided to record it so they could watch it whenever they wanted,” said Müller, a journalist who was born in Chihuahua, Mexico. In college, she had learned to edit videos. She quickly got a tripod and even put a camera on her bra in order to teach people how to prepare healthy recipes. Because of the success of the videos, she created the website Las recetas de Laura ([www.lasrecetasde-laura.com](http://www.lasrecetasde-laura.com)). She had more than enough recipes. “My life has been a struggle against being overweight,” said Müller, who at one point weighed 245 pounds and has always been on a diet. “Helping other people like me” was in her future. Aware that people can’t “always eat grilled chicken” to lose weight because they get bored, she decided to share her healthy food tips. “There are other non-fat recipes. We must also educate mothers and children,” she said.

Müller, who has Mexican roots, points out the dangerous relationship Hispanics have with food in the U.S., because in their homeland, they are “taught not to leave anything on the plate since childhood.” Fulfilled in her job, she talks about the gratitude that she and her husband— with whom she works from home— get from people who have joined the challenge of eating healthily. “One mom, who started because her son was diagnosed with high cholesterol and was about to get diabetes, has lost 30 pounds; three women wrote to tell us they had gotten pregnant” without needing to resort to artificial insemination. Müller’s goal is to continue changing the poor eating habits of Latinos and Americans. Next, they’re launching two channels, one with recipes in English and a prenatal one. “We want to get pregnant,” said this citizen of the world, who has lived in Brazil and New Zealand, where she received a postgraduate degree in journalism after winning a scholarship.

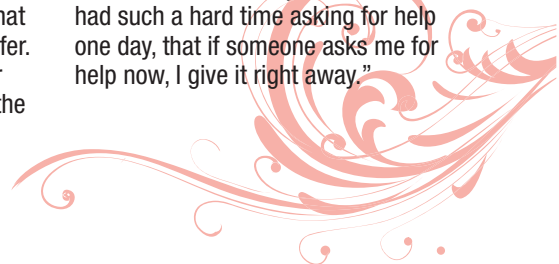


**Aída Luz Giachello**  
**Professor, Feinberg School of Medicine**

***Giachello said that she is a “product of the public schools” of Puerto Rico, where she attended high school spurred on by her mother. Curiosity led her to life-long study of the socioeconomic and environmental factors associated with the health of Latinos. Using documented data, she has launched programs and public policies to give voice to the marginalized.***

TIME magazine named her one of the 25 most influential Hispanics in America. However, Giachello describes herself as a humble person. “I don’t like to talk about my achievements. My passion is helping others through research,” she said, before summarizing the work she did at the University of Illinois-Chicago and Northwestern University. It includes launching the Midwest Latino Health Research, Training and Policy Center in 1993 and creating the Chicago Commission on Women during the administration of Mayor Harold Washington (1983–1987). Giachello calls herself an activist. “With the data collected, I like advocating to improve the health rights of marginalized groups, Latinos, women.” Her work, she explained, always focuses on the “health disparities” that Latinos and African-Americans suffer. This professor came to the U.S. for the first time with her husband in the

late 1960s. She had a scholarship and applied to a master’s program at the University of Chicago School of Social Services Administration. The couple returned to Puerto Rico years later, but left the island again after four years to move to Chicago permanently. After her experience as a social worker, Giachello realized that “helping one by one isn’t enough” and focused on seeking collective solutions by creating programs and taking action on public policies. Retired since December 2010, Giachello recalled how the U.S. “opened my eyes about sexism, racism and classism.” She has struggled against those problems for herself and others through research. Giachello, who has a persistent nature, learned a lesson on a bus in Puerto Rico that she still keeps in mind. “I had such a hard time asking for help one day, that if someone asks me for help now, I give it right away.”







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***Tanya Cabrera's advice to young people is emphatic: Continue your education! Whether or not you have papers.***



## Tanya Cabrera

**Assistant Director of Minority Student Outreach,  
Illinois Institute of Technology**

It's a dream for many and a right for all, she said. She teaches them how to achieve it and shows society the problems that undocumented students face. Cabrera has been involved in the community's struggles since she was young. Her activism emerged because "I stuck to my father, who was a community organizer, like gum." She would serve as an interpreter and help people fill out paperwork.

The paternal figure was mentioned several times during the interview. Cabrera recalled how her father, a Vietnam veteran, lost his job because he defended the civil rights of immigrants after a woman was rejected by a hospital when she was about to give birth and lost the baby. Cabrera realized who her father really was when she took a Chicano studies course and saw his picture in a book. "I used to be too little to understand," she said. She shares her story and struggle in various forums, aware that the issues that inspired her father to become an

activist are still current. At the same time, she wants to demonstrate that "yes, we can" and that there are people along the way to give a hand to those who need it.

Pregnant with two girls and with two other small children, Cabrera helps any immigrant who needs it, whether to find out options to attend college or the scholarships available.

"On weekends, people come visit me to ask questions," she said. Now, because of her pregnancy, once in a while she has to say no.

As chair of the Illinois Dream Fund Commission, she helps obtain scholarships for undocumented students. To date, she has raised \$645,000 and her goal is to reach \$2 million by the end of her term, in two years.

There's a lot of work left to do, including immigration reform, she said.

"It's what missing from President Obama's administration. It's the window we need."



***"We cannot give up when faced with the first obstacle," said Vargas, who has worked at St. Augustine College for 18 years and tenaciously overcame the challenges she met along the way.***



## María Josefina Vargas

**Chair of the Department of Early Childhood Education  
and Social Sciences, St. Augustine College**

"I like reaching the goals I set out for myself," she said, energetically. Education is everything to her. She paraphrases Nelson Mandela to highlight that it definitely is "the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world." That's why, at times, she doesn't separate "work from my personal life. It's like a continuation, but it's my passion," she said, laughing while attempting to answer how she keeps balance in her life.

Born in Cartagena, Colombia, Vargas left her country in 1980 with her parents, when she was 17. Once here, she decided to get a bachelor's in sociology and psychology from Northeastern Illinois University.

Wanting to work in Chicago's public schools, she continued with a master's. However, her first job was at Illinois Bell, where she coordinated the yellow pages.

In 1990, she joined the board of education. That's when she started gaining recognition, after leading the

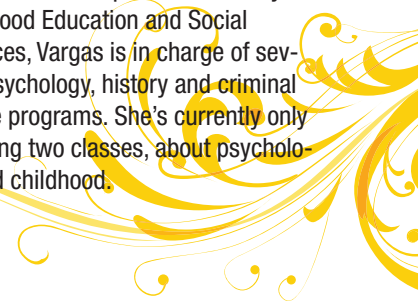
committee that promoted bilingual education reform in public schools. Five years later, she joined St. Augustine College, starting as a part-time professor in the evenings.

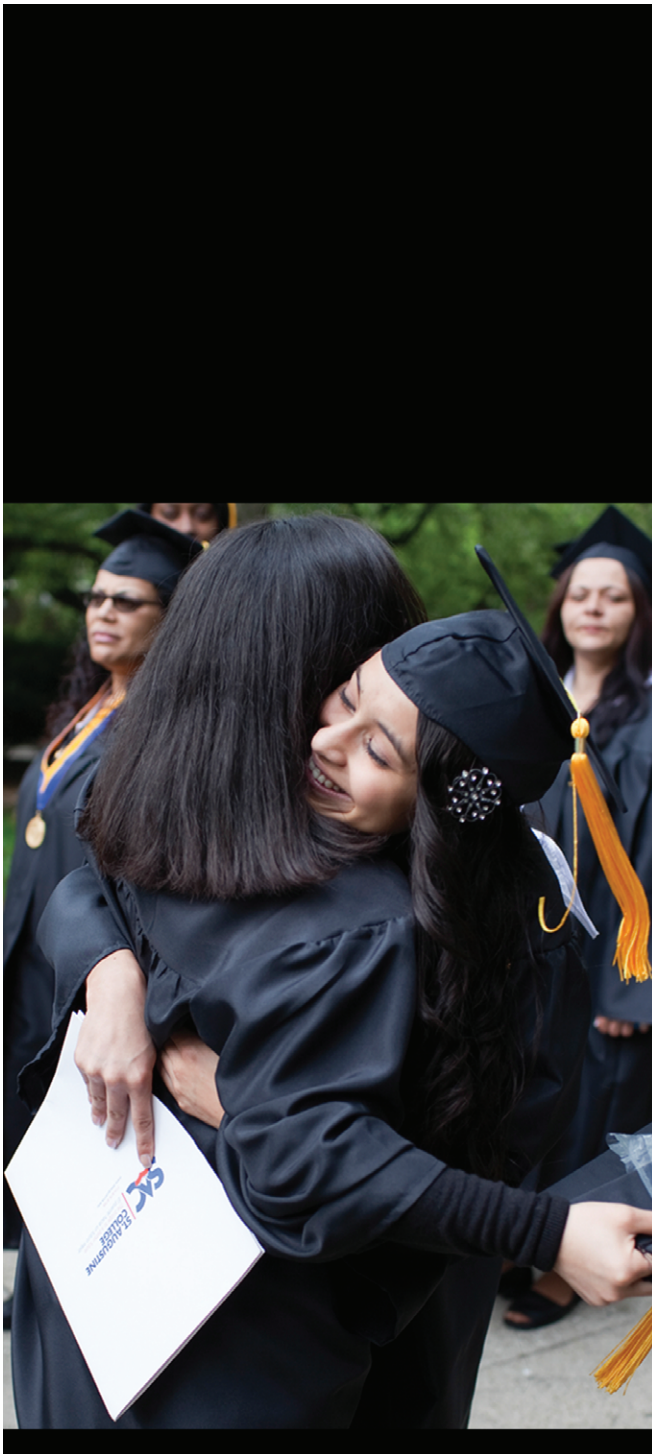
"The majority of the population is Latino; people who for some reason have been unable to finish their education," Vargas said.

Without a doubt, not knowing English is a determining factor. That's why the school offers the option of starting classes in Spanish.

Vargas recognized that in the almost two decades that she's worked at the college, there has been "a major change in students. They used to be older; now there are more young people who come to finish high school."

As chair of the Department of Early Childhood Education and Social Sciences, Vargas is in charge of several psychology, history and criminal justice programs. She's currently only teaching two classes, about psychology and childhood.





# Yo Creo I Believe

TOGETHER FOR EDUCATION

Most Hispanic families know that a college degree is necessary to achieve success in life. Unfortunately, many Hispanics who go to college are unable to finish, due to lack of monetary funds. In many cases, \$200 or \$300 make the difference between dropping out and graduating.

As an educational institution that serves middle to low income students, mostly Hispanics, we know how important it is to provide the support these students need to fulfill their dreams.

For this reason St. Augustine College has established the **Yo Creo / I Believe** campaign. Become a part of this initiative by funding one or more \$250 scholarships for students at St. Augustine. Your scholarship will not only contribute towards tuition but will help our students **cross the bridge to a better future.**



For more information regarding this campaign and contributions please contact: Grace Valadez at [gvaladez@staugustine.edu](mailto:gvaladez@staugustine.edu) or at 773.878.7044 or visit our website at [staugustine.edu](http://staugustine.edu)



**Sara Muñoz-Abramowicz**  
**Founder and CEO, Environmental Analysis**

***Honesty, perseverance, hard work... these words come up often during a conversation with Sara Muñoz-Abramowicz, a Mexican-American entrepreneur. She said that money isn't her main objective, but rather "my reputation and for my children to be proud" of her work as an entrepreneur.***

For Muñoz-Abramowicz, her family is essential, and she hopes for her children—who are 13 and 17—to continue the chain. She was inspired by her mother, who was also an entrepreneur and supported her five children, going back and forth from the U.S. “Four of us have followed her spirit,” she said. Muñoz-Abramowicz got married 19 years ago, right after she started her first business. After a decade as a broker, she decided to go back to school, with a more industrial focus and without losing sight of the relationship between real estate and the environment. “I saw the opportunity that existed in Chicago for women and minorities in business,” she said. She seized that opportunity. That was the birth of Environmental Analysis, a consulting firm dedicated to the environment that grew bit by bit, based on “generating trust.” She recalled how at first, her compet-

itors said it wouldn't last five years. However, it's still there and competing against the big firms. “It's nice to see that you can do it,” she said. Muñoz-Abramowicz, who is involved in community issues through the Sociedad Cívica Mexicana de Illinois—where she's part of the council—and other institutions, highlighted that women work hard in business and industry. For the past five years, a group of them has had a women's circle that meets once a month to “help each other out.” They come from different fields and exchange information to help the others. This isn't the only field in which the founder of Environmental Analysis shares her knowledge and experience. As an entrepreneur, she also shares her mistakes, because to “get ahead, you have to learn” what you shouldn't do again. In her case, eight years ago she learned the lesson of “not starting any business that I can't handle.”



**Vicky Arroyo**  
**President, MB Community Development Corp.**

***Vicky Arroyo works in a specific area of the bank because she feels that there, she always "makes a difference in the communities."***

She has led the community development department for years but knows the bank very well, since she has worked there for two decades. At 18 she decided to study accounting, although now she has caught the law bug. “My career is very fulfilling, but I would like to learn a bit more about legislation that affects my customers and me,” she said, wondering whether she made the decision too fast. Arroyo recognized that new passions grow, like the one she has for her current job, and perhaps going back to college. She likes her job because “I'm connected to people. I'm like a liaison between the bank and the NGOs,” she explained. Her work consists of managing community activities for the bank—whether loans in neighborhoods that need economic improvement or affordable apartments—and employees. Her years managing the new con-

struction department and loans to government subsidiaries were left behind. Born in Chicago, Arroyo is very aware of her Mexican roots. Her parents were born in Mexico. “I grew up near my relatives, with whom I spoke Spanish, and was able to learn about my culture and history. Here you can maintain your diversity, and at the same time, try to continue it.” She's also involved in several Hispanic organizations that help the community. Of them, The Resurrection Project holds a special place in her heart. Its headquarters “is located in the church where I grew up and studied catechism,” she said. With three children and always seeking opportunities to improve, Arroyo considers herself a family-oriented person whose first goal is “to follow the good example of my parents and instill it in my children.”



**★ Maritza Hernández**  
**Sculptor and Entrepreneur, Hernández & García LLC**

***Her first sculpture, of Opus Dei founder Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, was a success for Cuban-American Maritza Hernández. “I thought that I wouldn’t be able to develop my artistic side, because I was working on my advertising and marketing business,” she said, recalling that her grandfather got her started in her passion for art.***

At that time, she had been working in the communications industry for two decades with her friend, Margarita Hernández, with whom she co-founded the first marketing agency aimed at Hispanic women.

“The advertising business is very competitive, but I kept taking classes with several sculptors in the hope of someday being able to fulfill my dream” of being an artist.

Her efforts weren’t in vain and today she’s a renowned sculptor.

The sculpture of Escrivá—which received a lot of praise because of its likeness, after a long research process—brought others. She has been sculpting large pieces for the past 12 years.

The latest, unveiled in June 2013 at a park in New York’s Bronx, is of mythical Puerto Rican baseball player Roberto Clemente. “Now I would like

to make smaller sculptures and exhibit in a gallery,” Hernández said, looking ahead.

At 62, the sculptor recalled how her grandfather inspired her love of art in Cuba, where she was born. She did drawing and modeling on clay.

“I took my first fine arts classes at the Instituto San Alejandro,” she recalled, nostalgically.

Like many other Cubans, Hernández and her family left the island in 1969. She lived in Miami for two years and then moved to Chicago.

Married “very young, at 19,” Hernández dreams of continuing to be a good mother, good grandmother and good friend.

“It’s what I want to leave as a legacy,” she said. Although in her case, five sculptures—so far—already remain for posterity.



**★ Patricia Carlos Domínguez**  
**Director and Theater Promoter, Carlos Theatre Productions**

***Mexico and the United States merge in her biography, like Spanish and English in her plays. With more than two decades writing and producing plays for children and adults, Patricia Carlos talks passionately about her work—which fulfills the double function of entertaining and educating. There’s even a third: Combining cultures and traditions so they survive, no matter the place.***

“Having the children stay still, be interested and learn is a privilege that God gave me,” she said. They’re “the most demanding public,” Carlos said, mentioning that when one doesn’t like something, it’s easy for the entire audience to start making noise.

Her plays have been presented on various stages: schools, museums and festivals in Chicago and Mexico.

Her work behind the scenes stated in the 1990s, after a friend asked her for help producing a play for children.

“I became involved in that world, liked it and started writing my own play.”

With a bachelor’s degree in languages—Spanish, Portuguese and Italian—Carlos worked as an interpreter in the Chicago Aviation Department and for Iberia.

After catching the theater bug, she wrote “La Misión de un Nahual,” a

play about preventing child abuse, in 1994. This earned her a scholarship and she was able to complete her master’s degree. Then, Carlos began producing plays with renowned Mexican actresses.

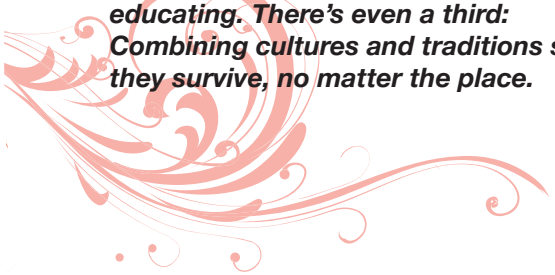
However, her connection to the world of theater with a message and culture began much earlier.

Born in the U.S., Carlos was brought up by Olga Galindo, who is from Mexico. “From her, I learned about women’s rights, cultures and defending the language,” she said.

At 6, she experienced discrimination for speaking Spanish. She vividly remembers having her mouth washed with soap for “using her language.”

However, she said, “I learned to make bubbles.”

Her bilingual plays show that we can do it.





***“She has always been there.” That’s one of the phrases most often said by the grateful parishioners of Lynette Santiago, who since 2003 has run El Rebaño Church with her husband.***

**★ Lynette Santiago**  
**Pastor, El Rebaño**

Santiago was born in Chicago and has Puerto Rican grandparents. Her parents founded the church. She decided to continue their work because, she said, “my purpose is having an impact on the lives of others, for them to connect with the life they need through me.”

Passionate and dedicated to connecting with people, Santiago also combines this with her volunteer work on several boards and with the Fellowship Connection. “I founded this organization in 2007 to provide services to the community,” she said.

Experience has taught her that before expecting others to listen to you, you must know how to listen to them. “I put this into practice on a daily basis and see to it that I listen and understand before trying to be understood.” Santiago has influenced the lives of many neighbors—those who lacked self-confidence, were addicts or were having a hard time because of illnesses.

She describes herself as “shy,” but work makes her seem more extroverted. “I would rather work behind the

scenes. However, in some way, the fact of being an effective communicator makes me be in front,” she said. Santiago comes from a family of immigrants, who came to the U.S. between the 1940s and ’50s.

“My uncle and grandfather worked hard, lived in haciendas and struggled for the American dream to give us what we have,” she recalled. Of all this effort, a lot is left, “the appreciation for my culture and not losing sight of where I came from,” she said.

A mother of four, Santiago recognized that her passion to connect with people at times makes it hard to balance her work and her family. Nevertheless, it’s a goal she sets daily. “I tell myself: I’m done. Now, with the children.”

Although this pastor is able to achieve that better balance between both worlds by “knowing when to say no,” she said.

Since Santiago’s agenda is so busy, good communication with her husband is essential. Involved in putting together the service at the church, on Friday nights she works with a team of youths to develop their leadership abilities.



***At 12, she was told that she couldn’t study because she was undocumented; she had left Mexico with her parents when she was 8. She studied anyway. Today, she has a degree in international studies and has worked as a community organizer for P.A.S.O. for five years. “I have some status, but not full,” she said, explaining that she applied for the deferred action program just last year.***

**★ Yesenia Sánchez**  
**Executive Director, West Suburban Action Project (P.A.S.O.)**

Before attending college, Sánchez participated in many battles to strengthen the community and ensure that immigrants like her—undocumented and documented—live with dignity. She struggled for them to have driver’s licenses and be able to attend college with in-state tuition rates. Her goals include giving young people tools and security to go to college and fight for what benefits them.

Sánchez said that she remains firm in her values to cause change.

At 31, she knows that there are more battles ahead.

“At a national level, I work for immigration reform, for a change in laws so that immigrants can live without fear,” she said.

A few months ago, she was arrested

during a political demonstration in front of the Capitol, with 105 women who advocated for that legislative change. On the other hand, she also fights to decrease deportations. “Of those deported, 76% don’t have criminal records. They’re workers and parents,” Sánchez said.

For her, those cases aren’t numbers. More than 100,000 are deported each day, she pointed out. “I see the impact on people every day.”

Very involved in her community activism, she recognized that “it’s not a 9-to-5 job,” and that the cases at times absorb all her attention.

It’s no easy job trying to make the U.S. “a better country where the rights of immigrants are respected and applied.”



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