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Latinas Unidas celebrates 15 years at awards ceremony

DANIEL WALLACE • STAFF WRITER • NOVEMBER 13, 2008

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As the ballroom doors opened to the Hyatt Regency Rochester Hotel Wednesday afternoon, Liliabeth Vargas stepped through wearing a princess-like gown, crown and pearl earrings.

People rose in her honor as she made her way through the crowd of about 300 people. For just a few minutes she was the center of attention and a symbol of how special the day was for a local organization, which celebrated its 15th anniversary in typical Latino fashion with a Quinceañera.

Latinas Unidas, an organization started by a small group of professionals who wanted to create a resource and support system for Latinas in Rochester, has remained true to its founding

mission.

This year, its annual Reconocimiento Award luncheon celebrated those 15 years by honoring women from the community, celebrating the past and looking to the future.

"Latinas Unidas is ready to announce to the world that the little girl is all grown up. ... They've accomplished a lot in 15 years," said Antonio Perez, chairman and CEO of Eastman Kodak [Company](#), the luncheon's keynote speaker who was also named honorary padrino (or godfather).

The event honored four Hispanic women: Nydia Padilla-Rodriguez, founder and artistic director of Borinquen Dance Company and director of community partnerships at the Rochester City School District, received the leadership service award.

"Its very meaningful when you're being recognized by a very well-established association of professional Latina women, and for me it's an honor because giving back to the community is something that should really be in all of our hearts when you think about what the young people are going through and the challenges that our young people are facing," said Padilla-Rodriguez. Other award winners included Gladys Pedraza-Burgos, chief for youth development and family services at the Rochester School District, who took home the career achievement award; Celeste Amaral, finance director for Graphic [Communications](#) and vice president of corporate finances at Kodak, who received the volunteer service award; and Angie Rivera, student at St. John Fisher College and a Wegmans Leadership Intern, who was awarded the youth leadership award.

In 2000, the organization partnered with the Women's Foundation of Genesee Valley to create a scholarship fund for adult Latinas who have entry-level work experience and seek job advancement and [financial](#) independence.

Virgen Diaz, 33, of Rochester, a patient care technician at Rochester General Hospital, was chosen as this year's recipient.



Christian Bryant escorts Liliabeth Vargas, a senior at East High School, to her chair during Latinas Unidas Reconocimiento Awards Ceremony at the downtown Hyatt Regency on Wednesday. (KATE MELTON)

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