

## *2023 Hispanic Heritage Month Award Recipients*



### HISPANIC/LATINO COMMISSION OF MICHIGAN

#### *Educator in the Community Award*

Celeny Quintino is a proud Mexican-American her parents are both from Guanajuato Mexico. She was born and raised in Grand Rapids Michigan. Her parent's vision to immigrate to the US was for their family to have a better future, with this award their dream has become a reality. Celeny's family has always been united and her parents taught her and her siblings the value of an education. She earned her education degree from Aquinas college with the support of her parents. At the beginning of her educational career, she struggled because of a language barrier. Once she began Kindergarten, she didn't know the English language. Luckily, she was able to get support through ESL classes. Throughout her education she always had her parents support and that encouraged her to go to college. She attended GRCC and was awarded a scholarship "Teachers of tomorrow" through which she was able to obtain her Associates degree. She then attended Aquinas College where she was able to get her Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education in 2021.

She is currently the Director of a Preschool program called La Escuelita in partnership with ELNC and Hispanic Center of Western Michigan. This year La Escuelita opened up a new license at a new location at Covenant House. The program has expanded and La escuelita currently has 2 preschool classrooms for 4-year-old children. The site currently has full staff with 2 lead teachers, 2 Assistant teachers, and a family coach. Celeny is the only Latina Preschool Director in partnership with ELNC who works with the Hispanic Community around Grand Rapids Michigan. She states that she "will continue to strive for excellence and commitment to the families in the program. We are these parents' first encounters with education, and we support them as they take Early childhood as a priority in the success of their children's lives"

#### *Celeny Quintino*



## *Community Service Award*

Born in Pharr, Texas Daniel Oropeza started working in the Migrant Camps of Texas, Florida and all the way up to Michigan at the age of 7. Daniel attended Kalamazoo Community college and Western Michigan University's HEP program. As a dedicated member of the community Mr. Oropeza has served as co-host for WMUK 102.1 FM's Alma Latina radio program. He is the founder of the Adelante show, a Facebook live talk platform for open discussion in the community. Mr Oropeza has served on the Southwest Michigan Cesar E Chavez Committee. He is the founder of Impact Visions volunteer group which runs an annual coat drive and annual clothing drive for migrant farmworkers. He recently organized two annual fundraising events to raise money for natural catastrophes such as the earthquake in Mexico and hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. Mr Oropeza's commitment to service has extended to over 30 different organizations where he has dedicated his time and efforts to the Hispanic community in Southwest Michigan and beyond. In 2022 Daniel launched his own landscaping LLC and has etched a name for himself as a Latino leader, volunteer, and entrepreneur in the community. In 2023 Mr. Oropeza took his own experiences as a migrant seasonal farmworker and applied that knowledge and experience to supporting the "causa" as a Michigan organizer with the UFW Foundation. Over the years Mr. Oropeza has stood out as a recognized changemaker in Kalamazoo and southwest Michigan having received the Cinco de Mayo Cesar Chavez award in 2019; the Caballero Award in 2020; the Talentos Latinos Award in 2020, the Thankful heart Award in 2021; the Premios K? Onda Knowledge of La Onda Award in 2022. Mr. Oropeza is a promoter of Tejano and Mexican-American music and serves as a cultural ambassador.

## *Daniel "Dano" Oropeza*



## *Arts in the Community Award*

Mary Puente Luevanos was among the first artists to have organized Latino exhibitions in Michigan. She and Nora Mendoza presented these shows, mostly in community spaces and on shoestring budgets. At that time, mainstream museums and galleries dismissed their artwork from exhibitions of contemporary American art. Their rejection by the museum gatekeepers was often based on their Hispanic names or so-called minority culture, not necessarily on the question of quality in their art.

Luevanos has been an extremely active member of the Southwest Detroit community throughout her entire life. She has worked for the Recreation Department for Special Projects, the Arts Camp, and Patton Recreation Center. In addition, as a storyteller and visual artist, Luevanos has performed at numerous schools, libraries, and institutes throughout Michigan. She founded BarrioWood Productions, Pancha y Mana puppets. Through this establishment, she has been able to foster an interest in literature through bilingual puppetry.

She states "I have been fortunate to be raised in a family that was immersed in music, literature, and the visual arts. I have always felt the love and support of my wonderful parents and the singing grandmothers, the story telling grandfather; the painters; the musicians."

## *Mary Puente Luevanos*



## *Abby Teasley*



## *Unsung Hero Award*

Abby's journey began in 1999 when her parents immigrated to Grand Haven, Michigan, from Saltillo, Mexico, where she was born. She has lived in Grand Haven ever since. She graduated from Grand Haven High School and attended Baker College of Muskegon to pursue a degree in Human Services. Growing up as a Latina in a predominantly white community, her family struggled. The lack of information, guidance, support, and opportunities for both she and her family created a fire in her soul to change that in the future.

Currently, she works for Grand Haven Area Public Schools as a Migrant Home Liaison / Recruiter, where her time is spent advocating and assisting Migrant and EL students and their families. During the summers, she supports the Summer Migrant Education Program, which closes the gap in education that many children of farm workers face, due to their mobile lifestyle. Her biggest accomplishment within the school has been to partner with LAUP and advocate to bring their Youth Development programs to Grand Haven High School.

Additionally, Abby works at St. John's Episcopal Church as their Latino Ministry Communications and Equity Coordinator. Her job supports the church's drive to continue a community that places the Latino people at the heart of their parish, by connecting them with their Latino ministry and different events throughout the year. Coordinating their biggest event, Misa and Fiesta en el Campo, which connects migrant farm workers and families with different health, education, and non-profit agencies has been the highlight of her job. At St. John's she is also part of their Immigrant Justice Team, which offers resources to the immigrant community to help increase awareness of their rights and assist in the pursuit of legal immigration status by connecting them with agencies that can support them.

Abby's work aligns with her passion to help others by breaking down educational, cultural, and health barriers and creating equitable opportunities for students and their families to exceed. This passion has taken her out of her introverted shell, where she has met and collaborated with other people and organizations that have the same passion and grit, she shares.

Presently, Abby serves as Co-Chair of the Allegan, Ottawa, and Barry Migrant Resource Council, which is a coalition of different agencies that come together and work on improving the quality of life of migrant and seasonal farmworkers and



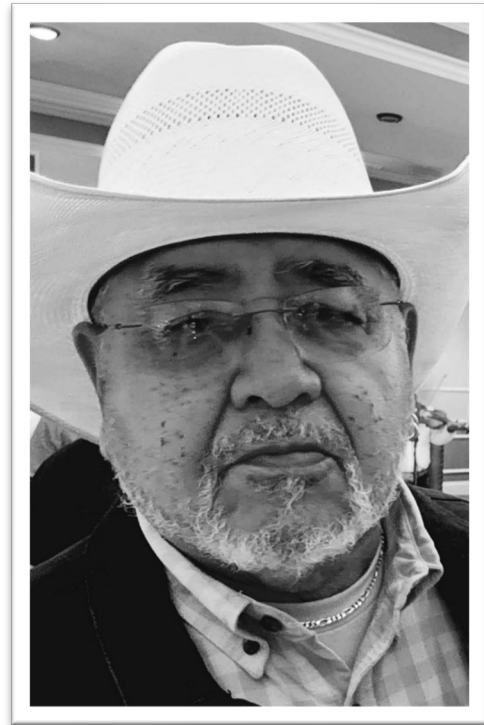
their families. Along the way, she has partnered with agencies and joined committees like MSU HEP which supports out-of-school youth who want to pursue their GED while still working; The Migrant Health Task Force committee which addressed health inequalities and disparities within the migrant community; Hope Church, and Love In Action of Tri-Cities that host a Welcoming Event for Migrant families in Grand Haven; and Read Ottawa that provides free literacy education tutoring to adults.

Abby states, "I am so thankful for each and every one of these agencies and people I have partnered with along the way because I could never do this alone, it takes a village. I will continue to walk the path of Matthew 25:40 to make a difference in the lives of students and their families, by creating and upholding an equitable school system and community where they feel they belong and have no limits to their lives and education. I hope to leave a legacy of compassion, understanding, and grit to my children and every student that I come in contact with. I have learned along the way that education is a strong tool and is something that can't ever be taken from us."

### *Veteran of the Year Award*

A decorated Vietnam Veteran and retired member of the Michigan Army National Guard. Mr. Jose Manuel (Manny) Estrada has served his country and community with valor and integrity. While serving in Vietnam, Mr. Estrada earned two purple hearts in combat; awarded for being wounded in action against an enemy of the United States, and The Vietnam Service Combat Infantryman Badge Marksman (Rifle) Medal and The Republic of Vietnam Campaign 2nd Class Gunner (M-60MG) Medal. After returning from combat in Vietnam, he began a career in law enforcement in 1971 serving as the first Hispanic Corrections Deputy Officer for the Ingham County Sherriff's Department Jail. Shortly after, (in 1973) he joined the police academy and began serving as the first Hispanic Road Officer with the Ingham County Sherriff's Department. In 1993 he was promoted to Road Sergeant for the Sherriff's Department, where he made assignments and briefed the other road officers before beginning their shifts. Mr. Estrada was the first Hispanic promoted to Sergeant within the Sherriff's Department. He then worked the narcotic's unit for 2 two-year assignments assisting in complex drug interdiction operations. He then became the supervisor for all county parks within Ingham

### *Jose Manuel Estrada*



County for four years, where he served as the first Hispanic in this role. He then returned to serving as a road officer until he retired in 2005.

Mr. Estrada did not end his military involvement after Vietnam, instead he enlisted in Michigan's Army National Guard for over 25 years, serving as a helicopter mechanic and helicopter mechanic instructor. During retirement he served for five years as a Juvenile Court Officer for Ingham County. In service to his community, Mr. Estrada has been active in his church community as a Grand Knight with the inaugural San Juan Diego Chapter of the Knights of Columbus. He took on the role of Grand Knight for two years while a part of the organization. Additionally, Mr. Estrada was the Chair of the Cristo Rey Fiesta, managing and organizing one of the largest Hispanic three-day festivals in mid-Michigan, two years in a row. Currently he is a member of the St Vincent de Paul Group, where he assists families access much needed resources and services, previously he was the President of the group for 6 years. Mr. Estrada is well respected in his community and has contributed greatly to increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in Law enforcement in Ingham County. He is a proud husband, father, grandfather and is humbled to receive this award.

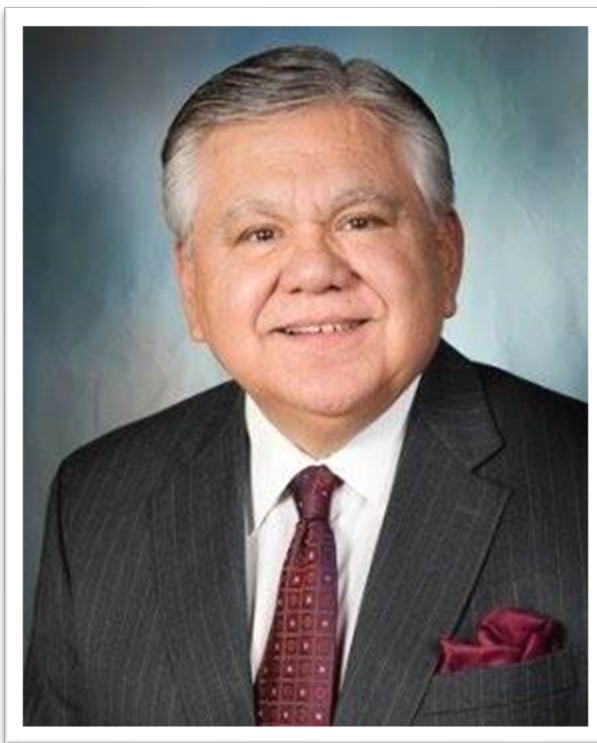
### *Lifetime Achievement Award*

Gilberto "Gil" Guevara was born in Saginaw, MI to the late Bartolo P. and Francisca (Mendoza) Guevara. Gilberto is a graduate of Saginaw High School and Delta College. He continues to study various topics at Saginaw High School Valley State University, the American Institute Par-Legal Studies, and the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.

During the Vietnam War, Gilberto served in the U.S. Army and was Honorably Discharged for his service in 1969. After his service in the U.S. military, he worked for Saginaw Steering Gear Division-GMC, Trustee for the Saginaw Board of Education, a Field representative for the Human Relations Department for the City of Saginaw, and Executive Director of the Latin American Affairs Department for the Catholic Diocese of Saginaw.

With over 52 years of community service to the city of Saginaw, he has served diligently on the multiple boards of directors and commissions, such as:

### *Gilberto "Gil" Guevara*



- American G.I. Forum of Saginaw (State and Local Commander)
- Saginaw County Community Action Committee Board
- Police Community Relations Commission of Saginaw
- Hispanic Latino Commission of Michigan (appointed by Governor Rick Snyder)
- Mexican-American Council, Inc. (Senior Advisor)
- Latinx Leader for the Enhancement of Advocacy and Development (LLEAD), Michigan

The awards, recognitions, and certifications that Gilberto has received include The Adelante Education Award, La Union Civica Mexicana, Image Award Saginaw Hispanic Historical Society, Grand Marshall of both the Positive Results Downtown Christmas Parade and the Saginaw Cinco de Mayo Parade, Friendship Games Board of Directors Award, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. Award, State of Michigan Special Tribute Recognition from State Rep. Vanessa Guerra and State Senator Ken Horn, and many other awards and recognitions from many other communities and councils.

Gilberto is married to Guadalupe (Villareal) for 55 years. He has two sons, Gilberto II and Andres Ramon, a daughter, the late Cynthia Laura, daughter-in-law Dawn Marie (Corbett) Guevara, and one granddaughter Gabriella Rose Guevara. In his free time, Gilberto likes golfing, camping, volunteering with St. Joseph Church, attending family functions, and traveling and touring other countries with his wife Guadalupe.



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