

# In Celebration: HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

BY OSCAR ROBLES



Each year, Americans observe National Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15 to October 15 and celebrate Latinos' histories, cultures, and contributions in the US with ancestors from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. This annual celebration began in 1968 when President Lyndon Johnson declared the first Hispanic Heritage Week, and now in 2021, 52 years later, our reason to celebrate is stronger than ever.

Speaking to a wonderfully hopeful and determined group of college-bound high school graduates receiving scholarships on behalf of the Napa County Hispanic Network, I couldn't help but feel a sense of pride for what this community had collectively accomplished. Gathered with their families, these young scholars were being honored with merit and need-based scholarships to help pay for college expenses. Throughout lunch, 24 individual scholarships were awarded to some of the most incredibly focused and hardworking students I'd come across. Many had hardened aspirations of becoming teachers, farmers, winemakers, engineers, lawyers, and doctors. Most had already been accepted into four-year colleges, including UCLA, Berkeley, Davis, Cal Poly, and our own Napa Valley College.

Today, getting into any good college is a massive undertaking of hard work, faith, and luck. This is especially true for these students-- the often-forgotten children of the local Latino immigrant farm laborer community. These essential workers are the backbone of our famed industry, without whom our region would not be what it is today. They work for modest wages with workdays from dawn to dusk, often beginning as early as 4:00 a.m. Yet somehow, despite the long hours and time away from their children, they've managed to instill a focus on education and hard work while challenged with obstacles such as language barriers, costs, and navigating our complex education, financial, and healthcare systems.

The Napa County Hispanic Network (NCHN) is a local community resource established in 1983 by local Latino leaders to provide an information-sharing hub to the Spanish-speaking community to help these families bridge some of the gaps. Their

primary focus is to provide higher education opportunities through a college scholarship program believing that higher education is a pivotal stepping stone for upward mobility. Every year, NCHN hosts a gala to raise funds for its scholarship program. And thanks to generous partners and funders, to date, they've disbursed over \$600,000 to local students with strong GPAs who are faced with economic hardship.

In the spirit of Hispanic Heritage Month, we celebrate the contributions and successes of local Latinos and honor these young scholars for their dedication to hard work and perseverance to realize their college dreams, their incredible parents for passing down our cultural values of faith, hard work, and resilience, and the Napa County Hispanic Network, whose information and resource sharing has and will continue to contribute immeasurably to the growth and success of our Latino community.

To learn more about NCHN or to donate, visit [www.napacountyhispanicnetwork.org](http://www.napacountyhispanicnetwork.org) or email Ricky Hurtado at [r.hurtado.napa@gmail.com](mailto:r.hurtado.napa@gmail.com).

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