

Stockton 2016 Graduate Lidia Martinez Wins National Award for Spanish Majors

For Immediate Release; with Lidia Martinez photo

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Galloway, N.J. - Lidia Martinez, a 2016 graduate of Stockton University, has been awarded the Mario Vargas Llosa Award, granted yearly to one Spanish major or minor in the nation who has demonstrated outstanding achievement in academic courses and exemplary involvement in extra-curricular activities related to Spanish.

The award, named for the winner of the 2010 Nobel Prize for Literature, is given by Sigma Delta Pi (the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society) and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) to an undergraduate who is a member of Sigma Delta Pi.

Winning the award "is truly remarkable because there is only one recipient for this most prestigious award," said Gorica Majstorovic, associate professor of Spanish and coordinator of Latin American and Caribbean Studies, who nominated Martinez for the award. Majstorovic was Martinez's adviser for the past two years as well as her professor and mentor.

Martinez, a resident of Egg Harbor Township, N.J., earned her B.A. with program distinction, and graduated with a Spanish major and a Latin American and Caribbean Studies minor on May 15. She will be accepting the award at the AATSP's annual congress in Miami on July 10.

"I chose a Spanish major because I like to help my community," said Martinez. She is teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to Latino older adults at two churches, St. Mary's in Pleasantville and Ministerio Por Gracia Sois Salvor in Northfield, working as a fellow of the Stockton Center for Community Engagement. She credited Merydawilda Colon, the SCCE's executive director and a professor of Social Work, with giving her the paid fellowship opportunity.

"Now I know I want to be a teacher, because of Dr. Colon," she said. "It gave me confidence." Martinez also is currently a substitute teacher at Pleasantville High School and plans to get her teacher certification using the alternate route. **-more-**

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Martinez, 38, took a long route to get here, beginning with her roots in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. She attended high school and earned an associate's degree while living in New York City. But the poor urban air quality led her and her husband, Amado Placencia, to relocate to South Jersey, since she and her children suffer from asthma.

While living in Egg Harbor Township and working as a secretary in Pleasantville, she kept hearing that Stockton was a great school. After casinos started closing in Atlantic City, the business where she worked was affected and she lost her job.

"So I decided I had no choice but to finish my degree," said Martinez.

Martinez credited "Professors Gorica Majstorovic, Arnaldo Cordero-Román, Alfonso Gandica and Javier Sanchez - thanks to all of them, I was recognized for the award." She also thanked her personal support system for helping her graduate: "My mother, Luisa Reyes, my husband, Amado, and my three children, Amado, Kayleen and Ramthony - without their support, patience and love, this dream couldn't be possible."

But Martinez admitted it was not easy. "I won this award because of my hard work, dedication, grades, perseverance, my teachers, and of course my family," she said.

She was on the Dean's List while at Stockton, but still found time for other activities, such as starring at Dante Hall in the Spanish-language play, "La Botánica," as the main character, Dona Geno. She continues to work at WLFR 91.7, Stockton's radio station, on the show, La Voz Latina, which is heard on Mondays from 5-6 p.m.

Her ideal next step would be to get a job in the Pleasantville school system, where she already knows students and teachers from working as a substitute. She sees the impact she can have there and finds that fulfilling.

"By teaching Spanish I will be able to help out and be closer to my community," she said. "I love to help everyone - that's why I feel very happy that finally I got my Bachelor's degree, which will help me to keep helping others."



Lidia Martinez

Photo by Susan Allen/Stockton University