



Training program forms to mold Latina women into future leaders

Steering Committee

Sonia Parras Konrad
Chair, Outreach chair

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Alba Perez
Co-chair, Curriculum chair

DES MOINES – The Latina Leadership Initiative of Greater Des Moines (LLI) has formed to empower young Latina women to become the next generation of leaders.

JoAnn Mackey
Vice-chair, Logistics chair

The LLI will launch its first class in the fall of 2013 with graduation in spring 2014. The program has a unique curriculum that is designed to advise Latina women on how to grow personally and professionally within their own community, as well as the mainstream community.

Alicia Claypool
Treasurer, Finance chair

Maria Alonzo-Diaz
Secretary

“Its creation is necessary to the future of the Latino community in that it fills a gap where there is a lack of culturally appropriate leadership support for promising Latina women,” said Sonia Parras Konrad, chairwoman of the 12-member steering committee that oversees the program. “The women will receive the encouragement necessary to be who they are and who they want to be while helping them realize their potential.”

Melissa Walker
Communications chair

Isbelia Arzola
Curriculum committee

Committee members also want the program to create a heightened awareness of social responsibility in the Des Moines area and provide attention to the needs of the entire Hispanic community, Parras Konrad said.

Elizabeth Balcarcel
Outreach committee

Diane Krell
Logistics committee

The program’s curriculum will address empowerment, teamwork and community building, culture, language and social changes, public speaking, career advancement, development and networking, current issues that affect the Latina community, and how to run a meeting, plan a program and prepare a budget.

Maria Lazzarino
Finance committee

Mayra Moriel de
Banuelos
Outreach committee

Initially, 10 to 15 women ages 20 to 30, who are in the beginning stages of their careers, will be selected to participate in LLI through a competitive application process. Applications are currently being accepted for participants and mentors, and can be accessed by contacting the office at 515-505-0676 or through the LLI website at www.latinaleadershipinitiative.org. The deadline is June 1.

Sandra Sanchez
Curriculum committee

Christina Fernandez-
Morrow
Project Coordinator

Participants also will work closely with a mentor to cultivate their leadership skills. Those who have significant community leadership experience and can provide support and networking opportunities can apply to become mentors. Interested persons can call or go to the LLI website under the “Applications” tab to apply.

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“It is the goal that through the Latina Leadership Initiative, we will begin to see more and more young, powerful and well-educated Latinas serve on boards, commissions and in other leadership capacities in the Des Moines metro area,” Alba Perez, co-chairwoman of the committee, said.

Perez said with the rapidly growing sector of the Latino population, the Des Moines metro area is in need of leadership programs that specifically target this community. The Latino population in Iowa increased almost 84 percent from the 2000 U.S. Census to more than 158,000 residents, or 5 percent of Iowa’s 3 million residents as of 2011, according to the State Data Center of Iowa. About 12 percent of the state’s Latinos live in Polk County, with about 25,000 living in Des Moines.

Latina women need even more encouragement, Parras Konrad said.

- Latinas account for 46 percent of all Latinos in Iowa. Hispanic and Latina women are less likely to graduate from high school or to receive a college diploma than other women.
- In 2005, it was reported that almost 91 percent of white women older than 25 had a high school diploma. The number is significantly lower for Latinas: Only 57.6 percent had a high school degree.
- About 23 percent of white women have a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 8 percent of Latinas.
- Nationally, 64 percent of Latina women ages 20 to 64 are in the workforce compared to 72 percent of white women. Part of this can be explained by the fact that 71 percent of Latino families have children younger than 18 compared for 44 percent of other families.
- The unemployment rate for Latinos in Iowa was 8.2 percent in 2009 compared to 4.1 percent for all other Iowans.

Iowa women comprised just less than 50 percent of those who served on state boards and commissions in December 2006, according to the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women Report. Latinas represented 1.5 percent of those appointees, while they make up 2.5 percent of the Iowa population. Currently, there are six Latinas who hold elected office at the city or school board level or higher throughout the state of Iowa.

Christina Fernandez-Morrow has been hired as the project coordinator for the LLI. She is a Chicago native and graduate of Iowa State University. Fernandez-Morrow has worked in the marketing field for more than 10 years and has experience in grant writing, media relations and program management. Latina Magazine recently awarded her with one of its “Next Generation Latina” awards.

“It is important we have leaders who can advocate for their communities, as well as effectively navigate mainstream society,” she said. “My hope is that established leaders in Des Moines will see the value in what we are doing and support this project.”

For more information, contact Melissa Walker at 515.681.7731 or media@iowalatinos.org.

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