Latinos of influence honored at scholarship ceremony

April 17, 2012 — Chicago State University honored influential members of the Latino community — Pedro DeJesus Jr. and Salvador “Tony” Godinez — at its 10th Annual Latino Resource Center Scholarship Dinner, April 13, at the Hilton of Oak Lawn.

“This event allows the university to be a responsible citizen and partner of the Latino community,” said CSU President Wayne D. Watson, Ph.D. “Chicago State University is honored to recognize the hard work and dedication of these accomplished individuals, as they are great role models for our entire student body.”

At the dinner hosted by Mike Oquendo of Mikey O Comedy Productions, more than 170 people celebrated the success and stories of Corporate Citizen Honoree DeJesus, senior vice president, general counsel and corporate secretary of Tampico Beverages, and Alumni Honoree Godinez, director of the Illinois Department of Corrections.

Scholarships and events that spotlight Latino success have huge implications for America’s fastest-growing minority group, said Fernando Diaz, Latino Resource Center director. As an institution with proven ability to educate and support minorities, first-generation students and those from the lowest economic quartile, CSU is investing in ensuring Latino students do what far too few accomplish at many other four-year colleges: Graduate.

“Educating all students well and getting them across the finish line is the biggest challenge facing higher education today,” Hilary Pennington of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation said in response to a 2010 report on Latino college graduation rates. “These are the students who are going to replace the baby boomers, and who we will rely on to drive our economy over the next several decades.”

Toward that end, Chicago State’s Latino Resource Center established the Latino scholarship fund to help students at complete their degrees. In 2003, the university embarked on an ambitious campaign to raise the financial resources to support deserving Latino students, and more than $100,000 in financial support has been awarded.

“Time and again, we have students waiting on the LRC scholarship just to walk across the stage at graduation,” Diaz said. “When you provide support, especially financial support, it’s one thing off a student’s plate as they’re balancing families, work and school — and often in that order.”

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