

Honoree's roots run deep

Burgos devoted to Brass City communities

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WATERBURY — David Burgos was born in Hartford, but has devoted most of his life to the communities of the Brass City.

"There's just something special about Waterbury," Burgos said. "I can walk in any neighborhood, and I mean any, and I can feel safe. I can feel pride. I can feel a sense of family."

On Friday, the mayor's office will recognize him as the 2015 Puerto Rican Mayor for the Day.

"I have found few people with such a strong character and quality of caring for Waterbury associates as Mr. Burgos," Geraldo Reyes, aide to Mayor Neil M. O'Leary, said, "a solid man of great integrity."

Burgos made his way to the Brass City in 1988 as a Catholic priest. He served at St. Margaret and St. Francis church before deciding he would leave the priesthood to marry his wife, Elizabeth Burgos. He started researching local non-profits for a job that allowed him to give back to the city he grew to love. A week before he officially stepped down as a priest, Burgos was given a job at Connecticut Junior Republic, an agency dedicated to assisting at-risk and troubled youth.

Burgos has been the agency's program supervisor for 22 years.

"As a mentor, he's great," Joanne Medina, a former CJR participant and current CJR youth counselor said. Medina said Burgos welcomed her back as staff with open arms. "He was just happy for me to apply. I'm sure it feels good for him to see that it's working," she said about his efforts for Waterbury youth.

When asked what the most fulfilling part of his job is, Burgos ran from his office to grab Victor Marcial, a recent Wilby High School graduate who has been participating in Burgos's SAFE program since the sixth grade. Marcial said he became interested in his intended college major of graphic design after joining the program and learning how to use Photoshop. "I took it upon myself to learn more," the new University of Hartford student said.

"That's what makes my job satisfying," Burgos said. "We try to give them as many opportunities to spark their interest as possible."

Burgos said he takes pride in many aspects of the agency but especially its recruitment of minority staff.

Upon his arrival in 1988, Burgos helped establish the Hispanic Coalition of Greater Waterbury and assisted in the recruitment of Hispanic educators while serving on the Board of Education for nine years. He also currently serves as the Positive Youth Development Work Group chair for Waterbury's Bridge to Success program.

Burgos said he hopes to see the day when there is no longer a Puerto Rican Mayor for the Day but instead an elected Puerto Rican mayor.

"Can we do better? Absolutely," he said about the city's Hispanic community. "But at the end of the day, it's an upward trend. I'm accepting this honor on behalf of the community that helped make change happen, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic."



Destiny Lopez Republican-American From the left, Cassandra Rodriguez, David Burgos, Benjamin Olivera and Victor Marcial. Rodriguez, Olivera and Marcial have participated in CJR programs since the sixth grade and are all moving onto college with their experience.