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Albert Meraz  
**President, SFHAAC**

**MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT**

Welcome to the 2015 Spring Edition of the *¡Sí Se Puede!* Newsletter. Spring is one of the greatest seasons of the year. It's the season when everything starts to bloom and we all get re-energized. It's also the perfect time to take a vacation with the family, conduct a little spring-cleaning around the house and it's a great time to get active in our communities. In this edition of the *¡Sí Se Puede!* Newsletter, we share with you some of

the recent SF-HAAC events that have occurred over the past few months. Also, in this edition, we highlight our first SF-HAAC Gala event that took place in Oakland, CA last year and we showcase a few of our members who continue to give back by serving in their communities.

Later this month, your elected SF-HAAC Executive Council will convene for our annual meeting. The SF-HAAC Executive Council is working diligently in identifying worthwhile events and new developmental experiences for our members, including training workshops, community service projects, and networking opportunities. I would like to personally thank all of the members who took time to complete the SF-HAAC survey; your input is priceless, and it has provided us with great insight on how to improve our organization.

Finally, I want to thank you all for your continued support of SF-HAAC. Our mission is to focus on the needs of the membership and the communities we serve. Without your ongoing involvement and participation, SF-HAAC would not be the great organization that it is today.

Enjoy the 2015 Spring Edition of the *¡Sí Se Puede!* Newsletter!

Best wishes,

*Albert Meraz*

SF HAAC President

### SF HAAC Gala

October 3, 2014  
Oakland, CA

An evening to remember! It was an evening filled with laughter, camaraderie, honoring our leadership in the Hispanic way we know how; Mariachi, dinner, folkloric dancers and lots of dancing. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet our fellow SF HAAC members from throughout the region. During the evening, it was nice to see our generational gaps disappear as those with many years of experience with the agency reached out to the younger members. Our Regional Commissioner Grace Kim provided the attendees with opening remarks. Rafael Moya gave us all an inspirational keynote speech that left the desire to keep reaching for the stars! It was a wonderful

experience to walk through the room and see Hy Hinojosa, Patty Robidart, and Gail Leon mingling with our members.

Thank you to our wonderful organizers, Erika Leonard, Angelica Castillo, Carla Valadez, and Juan Garcia.

Congratulations to our first ever SF HAAC Awards recipients:

2014 SF HAAC Outstanding Mentor- Mr. Alfredo (Al) Ballon

2014 SF HAAC Community Service Award- Mr. Juan E. Garcia

2014 SF HAAC Outstanding Mentee- Ms. Irma Kong

2014 SF HAAC Leadership Award- Mr. Alfredo (Al) Ballon

SF HAAC Executive Council Leadership Award- Mr. Jason Welsh



2013-2014 SF-HAAC Executive Council



Al Ballon and Mayra Ramirez

**SF-HAAC Gala**



Carla Valadez, Erika Leonard, Patty Robidart



Rafael and Rosa Moya



Patricia and Albert Raymond



Left- Laurie Miraglio, Maria Schlosser, Al Ballon, Marilu Santos and Erica Casillas

Right: Patty Robidart, Erika Leonard, Juan and Tiffany Garcia



**SF-HAAC Gala**



### Keep Riverside Clean & Beautiful

By: Jaclyn West

On Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, five members from the Inland Area volunteered in the Riverside Beautification Project. The members included me, Jacklyn West, Margaret Gomez, Paul Luna, Dulce Hernandez, and Emma Samaniego. Our group was assigned to the planting team. The team planted over 55 ficus fig plants to establish a green wall along Tyler St. to prevent opportunities of graffiti. The planting team saved the City of Riverside over \$10 per plant, totaling \$550 in labor savings.

Over 185 volunteers showed up to participate in the Beautification Project. The other volunteers

were divided into graffiti and storm drain cleanup teams. The graffiti team used 3 gallons of paint to remove 40 tags from a fence line along Bradford Ave., a spillway along Jurupa Ave., and metal poles along Rutland Ave. The storm drain team removed 100 lbs. of litter and debris from storm drains and waterways near Rutland Park. In total, the volunteers collected over 3,620 lbs. of litter, green waste, and bulky items in the Arianza and Rutland Park neighborhoods. With busy lives, it can be hard to find time to volunteer. However, the benefits of volunteering are enormous to you, your family, and your community. Volunteering allows you to connect with your community and make it a better place. Volunteerism brings together a diverse range of people from all backgrounds and walks of life. Both the recipients of your volunteer efforts and your co-

workers can be a rich source of inspiration and an excellent way to develop your interpersonal skills.



Emma Samaniego

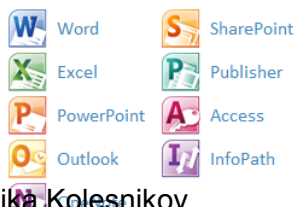


Left to Right: Melissa Lewis, Gilbert Gonzales, Margaret Gomez, Emma Samaniego, Paul Luna, Dulce Hernandez and Jaclyn West.



Paul Luna

### Microsoft HOME USE PROGRAM



Veronika Kolesnikov

### HUP- Home Use Program

This program enables SSA Federal employees, State DDS employees, and SSA contractors to purchase a licensed copy of Microsoft Office to install and use on their home computer for only \$9.95.

<http://gifwhup.ssahost.ba.ssa.gov/>



Greetings All,  
I wanted to share with you my recent experience in participating in the Job Experience Learning Program (JELP). JELP is a new career development program created by Carolyn Colvin, ACOSS. JELP provides employees without Head Quarters (HQ) experience the chance to visit HQ components to gain experience and knowledge of HQ functions. Similarly, HQ employees without operational experience could have the opportunity to visit a field office (FO), the Office of Central Operations (OCO), or the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR). I was humbled at the opportunity to be part of the second class of JELP participants in March 2015. I spent a month working with the outstanding folks of the Office of the Chief Administrative Law Judge -

Hearing Offices (OCALJ) at ODAR HQ in Falls Church, VA. During my assignment, I had the opportunity to work alongside some outstanding leaders and very talented staff. Prior to my arrival at ODAR HQ, I had no idea what ODAR really entailed, other than handling the regular appeals when customers' cases get denied at the reconsideration level. After my 30-day assignment, I found a new appreciation for the vital role that ODAR has in delivering service to the public we serve. After being in the field operations most of my career, I was able to bring the field perspective to this new assignment. Additionally, I was exposed to foreign claims, fee petitions, hiring, ODAR facilities, national mentoring programs, and I had the opportunity to trouble-shoot

some problematic cases while working alongside attorneys. Overall, the experience was remarkable. Since completing this developmental program, my perspective of the Agency has improved tremendously and I would recommend this program to anyone who wants to step out of his or her comfort zone. To the folks in ODAR, thank you for the opportunity to learn a little bit about your world.

~Albert Meraz  
District Manager  
Hemet, CA DO

## Alumni Rock Counseling Center

By: Jesusita Rutledge

As a Latino and African-American woman, I value my community above all. My community faces many adversities, and challenges. All obstacles aside, I know the good in my community, so I fight. As a volunteer at the *Alumn Rock Counseling Center*, I work with pregnant and parenting teens. I feel empowered to affect positive change in my community. I feel I give a voice to the voiceless and I take action to challenge the systems to create policies and laws to

support this valuable community. I hope to empower and organize others in my community to get involved. While with *Alumn Rock Counseling Center*, I organize health house parties, implement responsible reproductive health education in schools, conduct phone banking during campaigns, and more. The most rewarding experience for me was registering voters in the community and lobbying our state legislators. A great number of people in my community are unable to vote due to many obstacles. Despite this, I was able to help some of them who had never before exercised their right

to vote. I had an opportunity to stress the importance of voting and share how legislation affects our everyday lives. My goal is to organize efforts throughout the city to work on social issues. Volunteering has given me the tools to connect effectively with my community. Through my role as a volunteer, I cannot help but to be grateful.

### Save a Life– Donate Today



Celia Andriano

As a blood donor, I am part of an essential group of dedicated people who give blood regularly to help others.

When I first gave blood, I had no idea my blood type made me a prime candidate for platelet, plasma, and red cell donations. I decided to become a platelet donor ten years ago when I learned platelet transfusions could be the difference between life and death. During my monthly Check Up, I feel like a hero knowing my single donation can possibly save the lives of others and help them manage their medical conditions. Many lifesaving medical treatments require platelet transfusions. Some of the most common

are cancer patients, those receiving organ or bone marrow transplants, victims of traumatic injuries, and patients undergoing open-heart surgery require platelet transfusions to survive.

**Fast Fact I:** Platelets can be stored for only five days!

**What does this mean?** The need for platelet donations is vast and continuous!

**Fast Fact II:** One platelet donation can provide as many platelets as 12 to 18 whole blood donations.

**Five good reasons to donate blood:**

1. Free Mini Health Check-Up
2. Burns Calories
3. Improves Your Health
4. Administrative Leave
5. The Joy of Saving Lives

Hispanics are the fastest growing part of the United States population, yet only a small percentage of Hispanics donate blood. Many Hispanics carry the most com-

mon blood type, Type O blood. Since it is so common, the blood type carries the highest demand. Therefore, it is crucial to know that as a Hispanic blood donor, you make a powerful contribution to many patients in need.

Do you feel you do not have much to give? You have the most pre-



cious resource of all: the ability to save a life by donating blood! Help share this invaluable gift with someone in need.

¡Sí Se Puede!

### Volunteering at My Sister's House



Veronika Kolesnikov

I volunteered at numerous organizations since the age of 16. Volunteering is now a part of my lifestyle. I feel fulfilled inspiring others. Since 2013, I have been volunteering with *My Sister's House*. It is an amazing organization! *My Sister's House* helps victims of domestic violence, stalking and human trafficking. They have various programs including a 24-hour help line, a safe haven shelter program and a women-to-work program.

I have volunteered for *My Sister's House* at various events including a rummage sale, the Courage Run, the Safe Haven Run, the Hmong Community event and an Opening Door's Inc. event. During the outreach

events, I answer the public's questions about the organization and refer potential victims to services at *My Sister's House*. I greatly enjoy volunteering for this organization. They empower not only the victims and their families but also the community as a whole.

### Inland Empire Future Leaders Program



During the past thirty years, the Inland Empire Future Leaders Program (IEFLP) has provided summer leadership development conferences

Alejandra Yzaguirre for approximately 3,800 Latino eighth- and ninth-grade students from throughout the Inland Empire. The weeklong sessions include training in the leadership process, parliamentary procedure, cultural awareness, college preparation, career choices, citizenship responsibilities, financial literacy, and public speaking. The sessions are dynamic, intensive and fun-filled, but more importantly, we constantly encourage students to strive for academic excellence and

to contribute to their schools and community through personal involvement.

The IEFLP Summer Leadership conference is a six-day conference that will take place in Idyllwild, CA at the Idyllwild Pines Camp. Four-year follow-up surveys have indicated that the leadership experience leaves a lasting impression and that it effectively and positively influences the students. The surveys also indicate a 99 percent high school graduation and a 90 percent college-going rate for students participating in the program. In 2009, I was lucky enough to learn about the IEFP.

A good friend of mine from high school told me about it. She knew that my oldest daughter was of age for the leadership camp and she knew how dedicated I was to my children's edu-

cation. She figured I would be supportive of the opportunity and she was most definitely correct! Since then, I have had all three of my daughters participate in IEFLP's weeklong leadership camp. Although my youngest daughter attended camp in the summer of 2013, I have continued to support IEFLP. I also engage my daughters to continue to strive in their leadership roles and to give back to the program by volunteering their time as mentors and taking them to the yearly seminar/reunions. I also promote and invite friends and family to have their children experience IEFLP and to participate in the yearly golf fundraiser. I plan to volunteer with my husband and give a lecture in next year's reunion on the correlation of good nutrition and a successful education.

### Stand Up For Kids!



Sae Ibarra

As usual, we started our meeting by sharing our high and low points from last week. When her turn came, her hazel eyes gazed down at the table

followed by long silence. Then, instead of words, teardrops started to travel away from her. Each drop carried with it a heartbreaking story... the story of homelessness.

Since 13 years of age, Yvette has been "couch surfing" with just a backpack and no place to call "home." She loved her mother dearly, but her mother's gang affiliation forced her to leave as a matter of survival. Her eighteenth

birthday should have been filled with celebrations; instead, the society declared her as an adult and no help was to be found. That is until she found the Stand Up for Kids outreach card on a park bench. The phone call she placed with no hope and expectation has led to helping end the cycle of falling in the dark and is now helping her walk upward towards hope.

With the help of volunteers from Stand Up for Kids, Yvette is enrolled in continuation high school and on her way to getting a diploma. She knows she can count on us for her food, clothing, shelter, and transportation needs. During the past few weeks, we have been helping her find a job by sharing job interview tips, practicing mock job interviews, and building her resume.

Our weekly meeting comes to an

end, and she looks at me intently with her bright beautiful eyes and says, "Thank you..." But little does she know that we, the volunteers, take much more from seeing the little seed of hope inside her heart flourishing into a magnificently beautiful flower. Little does she know how incredibly humbling it is, and little does she know how it allows me to appreciate every moment of my life. Little does she know that actually... she is helping me.

I am incredibly grateful for learning about Stand Up for Kids through VolunteerMatch.org, because as Gandhi so gracefully said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." I wish for all the readers of the HAAC Newsletter to experience the same happiness and joy in volunteering.



### 2015 Mentorship Program Participants

Marla DiSarno  
Marilu Santos  
Pablo Pelayo  
Susana Aguilar  
Monika Martinez

Vanessa Martinez  
Jessica Plascencia  
Omotayo Ajose  
Maria Moore  
Michelle Herrera

Hasley Fonseca  
Paul J. Luna  
Lilia E. Haller  
Anna Roca  
Gina Perez

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### New Members

#### Sep 2014

Elvira Rodriguez-Alarcon  
Jennifer A Laskowski  
Sonia Padilla  
Abel Abrego-Salazar  
Cristina Ramirez  
Maria Moore  
Blanca Zamora  
Marla A Disarno  
Dean B Thap

#### Nov 2014

Victor H Gutierrez  
Denise M Estenson  
Frankee Juarez  
Pablo Pelayo  
Gloria Rodriguez  
Pablo J Gonzalez

#### Dec 2014

Gerardo Flores  
Justin Xu

#### Jan 2015

Miranda Castro  
Luis Luna  
Julissa Parra

#### Feb 2015

Alejandra Yzaguirre  
Alma E Perez  
Christina J Haskell  
Guillermo Acosta  
Jose Gomez  
Yesenia V Castillo



SSA offers the ability to learn different languages through Rosetta Stone. There are 31 languages to consider. Information about it is below and is from this link:

<http://personnel.ba.ssa.gov/ope/ces/wlrc/rosetta.htm>

SSA does not have unlimited capacity to sign up for Rosetta Stone. You may go on a waiting list if they are at capacity.

Note: If you sign up for this, select the Deputy Commissioner, Operations (DCO) as your component.