

Wheaton & Kensington Chamber of Commerce 35th Annual Community Awards Dinner Wednesday, April 24, 2019

At **Hollywood East Café**, 11160 Veirs Mill Road, Westfield Wheaton Mall, Wheaton, MD 20902

View 2019 photos:

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THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2019 TRIBUTE AWARD

The 2019 Tribute Award honors: **Los Chorros Restaurant** in celebration of their 30th Anniversary! This award is given in recognition of their significant contribution to the community. The quality of their food and top notch service has made Los Chorros a staple in the Wheaton & Kensington Community.

In 1989 Pedro and Reina Lazo opened their own restaurant after 12 years of experience in the Mexican and Salvadorian food industry. They wanted a “mom and pop” restaurant with authentic Mexican and Salvadorian taste and an at-home feel, and began as a 75-seat, carryout style restaurant. After a renovation and expansion in 1995, Los Chorros grew to a 175-seat restaurant, with a full bar. The day-to-day operations have since been handed over to their two sons, Omar and Jason Lazo, who maintain the authentic tastes and reasonable prices, and they have also expanded their community service.

MID-COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD AWARDS

Mid-County CAB Citizen of the Year: **Vincent Pistolessi, Volunteer at Inwood House.**

Mr. Pistolessi has been in service of his country and community all his life. He served in the US Navy as Captain in the Supply Corps; then has volunteered at the Knights of Columbus, Mental Health Association, Tax Assistance Program and Inwood House. Inwood House is an independent living community with 172 apartments for residents with disabilities or seniors of low income. Mr. Pistolessi began helping residents manage their finances over 20 years ago, and joined the Board in 1997. He has since served in many capacities – carving turkeys at Thanksgiving dinner, donating grocery gift cards and continuing to assist residents with their taxes. He spent countless hours assisting a resident apply for Social Security Disability, using his network to obtain pro bono legal advice. Mr. Pistolessi embodies the definition of selfless service to the community.

Mid-County CAB Community Association of the Year Award: **Wheaton Hills Civic Association** (WHCA) formed in 2014 represents over 1,100 homes and 3,500 residents in the heart of Wheaton with the goal of improving the health, beauty, and safety of its community. WHCA’s three priority areas have included: *Enhanced Walkability – working closely with MCDOT led to the completion of nearly three miles of new sidewalks within Wheaton Hills. This included new designated crosswalks, reconfigured intersections, installation of ADA-compliant ramps, improved lighting, and new stops. *Quality of Life – participation in clean-up days with the Girl Scouts; creating a float for the Wheaton Arts Parade; co-sponsoring with the WK Chamber and GFNCA a County Executive Forum; a District 18 Candidate Meet & Greet; and sponsoring a holiday lights block party. *Redevelopment of Wheaton-Claridge Park – a nearly \$3 million effort refreshed this 22-acre park. Restoration of wetlands, movement of parking away from the stream, restoration of the stream, new playground area and equipment, a renovation to the community building, and an expansion of the trail network.

WHEATON URBAN DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEE AWARDS

The WUDAC Business Leader of the Year Award: **Filippo Leo**, owner of the popular Filippo's Italian Specialties (formerly Marchone's) is awarded for his constant advocacy for the businesses in Wheaton. Whenever businesses are called for a meeting on Wheaton redevelopment, Filippo comes and is sure to raise issues that affect the broader community, not just his own business. He gives fair and reasonable feedback on the current state of redevelopment construction, and is truly an advocate for small business in Wheaton. Filippo is well-known by almost all the businesses in the area, and displays great leadership – his attendance at meetings deems their importance.

The WUDAC Best Property Improvement of the Year Award: **All Eco Design Center**, recently expanded its showroom in downtown Wheaton, doubling its size. All Eco offers design services and environmentally-friendly building materials, which are featured in the new showroom. The expansion also included façade improvements. All Eco Design Center is a Montgomery County-Certified Green Business and “walks the talk” by using a long list of environmentally sound practices in its showroom and projects. Dave Taghipour, All Eco Center's founder and president, is involved in the community in numerous ways. Dave has served on the Board of Directors of One Montgomery Green for many years and supports the organization through product and service donations, lending his space for meetings, etc.

PUBLIC SAFETY AWARDS:

The 4th District Police Public Safety Award: **Midnight Shift 8, Sergeant Keith Duggan & Sergeant Philip F. Meyer, Jr., Leaders**, has shown outstanding service, dedication and performance throughout the year. Consisting of 14 officers, the shift consistently performs exceptionally well, with an emphasis on traffic safety throughout the area. Over a 3-year period, they have removed 714 impaired drivers from Wheaton roadways. These efforts are dedicated to the memory of former 4th District Officer Noah Leotta, who was tragically struck and killed by a drunk driver in 2015. Shift 8 is committed to supporting Vision Zero, and traffic and pedestrian safety resources are directed to reduce and eliminate severe crashes. Members have issued nearly 7,000 traffic tickets and warnings in 2018. The shift issued 381 criminal citations and made 81 physical arrests, for offenses such as armed robbery, burglary, kidnapping, sexual assault and thefts from auto. Handling thousands of calls for service in a professional manner, the shift works cohesively to improve the quality of life in this area.

The Wheaton Volunteer Rescue Squad Public Safety Officer of the Year: **Firefighter/Paramedic Marcus Hendricks** began his service with the WVRS in 2012 and is currently an active volunteer paramedic on the Sunday Night Crew. Marcus is truly a role model, and consistently provides ethical, compassionate, and steadfast care to the patients that WVRS serves. He is unfailingly calm, respectful, and generous in his treatment of patients and colleagues alike. When he is not volunteering as a paramedic or engaged in pre-med studies, Marcus works full-time as a police officer with the County Police Department. He has truly dedicated his life to public service, and inspires excellence and embodies the WVRS' values of providing ethical, compassionate, and innovative volunteer service to our community.

The Kensington Volunteer Fire Department Public Safety Award: **Captain Truc Nguyen** joined KVFD in June 2010, during his summer break from Johns Hopkins University. He has advanced from student, to post-graduation live-in, into professional firefighter/paramedic with the DCFEMS. At Kensington he has served as the Senior Live-In, Station Representative, a member of Kensington's Board of Directors,

and in June 2018, was promoted to the rank of Fire Captain and given the responsibility of the Training Division. Over the past ten months he has revamped the check-off and qualification processes for minimum staffing positions on the fire engine, put a system in place to recertify members in key positions on the fire engine, and developed “Kensington Training Days” – a hands-on, active drill program, held quarterly for all members of the KVFD.

HIGH SCHOOL AWARDS

Einstein HS Teacher of the Year Award: **Mr. Steven Beale** is completing his 5th year of service in County Public Schools, all of them at Einstein. He teaches freshman Honors US History classes, which requires a special teacher with the patience and dedication to see students through the transition to high school. He also teaches an all-male class, where he fosters strong relationships, mentors the young men and takes them on field trips on weekends. From mentoring African-American males, supporting IB students writing extended essays, and advising a student teacher, Mr. Beale gives so much of himself to the school. He never hesitates to take on new projects, and is an exceptional teacher who wants to make a difference in the world. Mr. Beale says he owes all of his successes and achievements to his wife and parents; without whose support he would be nothing.

Einstein HS ESOL Student of the Year Award: **Oscar Ramos Cabrera** is now a senior, but as a freshman, he received no grades – for being too new. Oscar has since managed to fit four years of high school into three and will graduate on time with his peers. To accomplish this, he has exhibited unprecedented growth in speaking, reading and writing to an advanced level. Oscar has been named to the Honor Roll for four quarters, as well as earning straight A’s for four quarters. He is involved in the Jaime Escalante Spanish Honors Society, the International Honors Council and helps other ESOL students do their homework. He is also a part of the Montgomery College ACES program to pursue higher education, and plans to be an electrician. Oscar has successfully made the transition to a new school and country.

Einstein HS Student Community Service of the Year: **Austin Patterson** is a senior who has earned over 560 student service hours, accomplished primarily at Imagination Stage working as an inclusion facilitator for children with special needs. Here he utilized his theatrical talent to teach others during the summer. Austin is a part of the STAGE program, performing in a dramatic and musical performance every year. He also received the Superintendent Award for his involvement in theater. Austin plays a musical instrument with the Jazz Ensemble, sings with the Chamber Choir and the Acapella Club and argues with the Mock Trial team. He takes AP and IB courses and has been on the Honor Roll every quarter. Austin plans to double major in theater and public history and find a career in research or performing.

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Kennedy HS Teacher of the Year Award: **Ms. Neha Singhal** has become one of the most sought-after teachers at Kennedy since completing a Masters in Social Justice Education from the U of Massachusetts, and getting her teaching certification from the U of MD in 2016, Now in her third full year of teaching, Ms. Singhal’s class is a transformative experience, and not just an illustration of principles of government or a categorization of types of administrations. She has her students analyze everything, the questions are always thought-provoking, and the lessons always place the students at the center. Her work with the Minority Scholars Program helps students organize and advocate for themselves, and Ms. Singhal has helped the student body start having conversations that yield tangible and necessary change.

Kennedy HS ESOL Student of the Year Award: **Victoria DeAraujo** and her family moved to US from Brazil almost 3 years ago. In that time she has been a committed member of the NJROTC program. She has a weighted 3.58 GPA and has earned 94 Student Service Learning hours – over twice what was required. Staff members have the highest praise for her. She is helpful to her peers and is often found encouraging them to do more to improve themselves. Three years ago, she could not imagine that she would learn others languages or even get accepted into college in this country. Many things have happened to her and her family, but they have stayed together no matter what. She credits any “success” that she and her sister have achieved to her wonderful parents that have always supported them.

Kennedy HS Student Community Service of the Year: **Tatiana Quintanilla-Ramirez** is passionate about two things – volunteering and health care. She began her student service learning activities in 7th grade and has not stopped since. Many of her 1082 hours were earned in service to schools, volunteering at New Hampshire Estates Elementary school, Eastern Middle School and Kennedy HS, and the INOVA blood drives held at the school. This volunteering was done while maintaining a 4.0 GPA and being a member of the Health and Medical Careers Academy. When Tatiana graduates, she will be a Certified Nursing Assistant, and plans to go to college to pursue a degree in nursing with the ultimate goal of being a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner.

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Wheaton HS Teacher of the Year Award: **Ms. Tonia Chicas** fled with her family to the US in 1980 after the Civil War in El Salvador broke out. She grew up in a household of hardworking people who valued education and respecting others. Ms. Chicas graduated from Springbrook HS, went on to Montgomery College and then the U of MD. She went into education as she has enjoyed helping others learn, be successful, and to love science. At Wheaton HS since 2005, she has sponsored the Green Team and SGA, taught various science classes and more recently been part of the Bioscience Academy, teaching Human Body Systems. She is the coordinator of Knight Time, an after-school program whose purpose is to help ESOL students in academics such as math and English, help with their personal growth, and provide extracurricular opportunities that parents may be unable to, and contributes in a positive way to their lives.

Wheaton HS Student ESOL Student of the Year Award: **Ratcha Ruangakajohn** is a senior who moved to the U.S. from Thailand just 4 years ago. Learning to speak English proved to be a difficult challenge, that she continues to face. Initially she struggled with all her classes, but as her English improved, so did her grades and her social circle, making many new friends. Ratcha is now maintaining a 3.93 GPA. She continues to practice grammar and vocabulary. Ratcha has been accepted to Montgomery College where she plans to study architecture with the goal of being an architect.

Wheaton HS Student Community Service of the Year: **Kamilah Shaheed** is a senior and has been volunteering since the sixth grade. She has participated in everything from summer camps to festivals, but most of her experience has been as a student volunteer at the Kennedy HS Saturday school. Many years of assisting in the second grade classroom has been very fulfilling. Currently, Kamilah is doing administrative work and helping the coordinators, teachers and parents. She is unsure about where to go to college but has been accepted into the U of MD, Baltimore County and Montgomery College. Her goal is to major in either computer science or game design so that she can someday own her own video game company.

WHEATON & KENSINGTON CHAMBER AWARDS

The Chamber Member of the Year Award: **L. Jeannette Feldner, Letterforms Typography & Graphic Design**, is a long-time member of the WK Chamber and currently serves on the Board. Jeannette grew up in Kensington, attending Einstein HS, and has lived and worked in Wheaton for 35 years as a self-employed graphic designer. She also serves as Communications Director for One Montgomery Green (formerly Green Wheaton), is a Victim Advocate in Domestic Violence Court and a long time leader of Montgomery County NOW. Jeannette also co-teaches the Wheaton Community Center group of Bone Builders, leading seniors in weight training to prevent osteoporosis. She served for 6 years on WUDAC, including one as Chair. She worked with the Wheaton Urban District during the rebranding process and designed the lovely and versatile Wheaton and Taste of Wheaton logos, and has also contributed her time to the Wheaton Arts Parade.

The Chamber Business of the Year Award: **Carlos Auto Service** provides “Honest Work at a Fair Price” for Kensington and the surrounding areas with repair services for almost all vehicle makes and models. For over 35 and 30 years, respectively, Bill and Toni Church have helped to promote and grow Carlos Auto Service into the staple Kensington residents know. In 2017, they bought the business from an 85-year old Carlos so that their customers could continue to work with a place which they have always relied.

In 1958, Carlos Zamora, an immigrant from Costa Rica, opened a small, one-bay garage next to the gas station on the corner of Howard & Armory Avenues. Ten years later, Carlos built a five-bay garage on the corner of Howard & Summit Avenues. In 1982, Bill Church, a recent high school graduate, was hired, and by the late 1980’s, Toni became the full-time office manager; now most of the employees have been there for over 25 years. Carlos Auto Service takes great pride in sponsoring community events like the Kensington 8K race, and Day of the Book. They also donate automotive services for many local fundraisers, and sponsor the Children’s Miracle Network through its partnership with Wheaton’s Costco.

The Chamber Lifetime Honor Award: **Timothy Wiens** has served as the Executive Director of Jubilee Association of Maryland since 1979. Under his leadership, Jubilee has grown from one group home to an organization serving over 135 individuals in 70 different locations. After 40 years he is retiring this June. Jubilee is a member of the Mennonite Health Services Alliance, where Tim was on the Board for nine years, and the MD Association of Community Services, and a past Board President. Tim is the past chair of the Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee for Persons with Developmental Disabilities of Montgomery County, and is an active member of Leadership Montgomery. He is a past president and active member of the WK Chamber Board. This award is in appreciation and recognition for the years of outstanding leadership to the Chamber, and exceptional contributions to furthering the development of our community, helping to lift up and promote the dreams, dignity and worth of citizens in need.

These last 2 awards were not included in the program – Surprise Awards!

The Chamber President’s Award: **Laura-Leigh Palmer** in appreciation for years of outstanding contributions as an advocate for and mentor to fellow business associates and aspiring artists, and tireless devotion to supporting and promoting the cultural enrichment of our community. Constantly volunteering her time, Laura-Leigh has participated in various capacities with the Kensington Day of the Book Festival, the Wheaton Arts Parade, the Cedar Lane Unitarian Church, the Kensington Labor Day Parade, and “Angels for Children” toy drive as an always-helpful Santa’s elf.

For 18 years, Laura-Leigh's a.s.a.p. graphics has offered print and web design, and lately Google Enhanced StreetView tours, and social media services. She is on the Board and a Past-President of WK Chamber, a member of Wheaton-Silver Spring Kiwanis Club, a Past-President of the Montgomery Art Association, and an Adjunct Professor at Montgomery College teaching graphics, and the author of "Images of America: Wheaton" published by Arcadia Press.

The Chamber Appreciation Award: **James Onder** for outstanding and dedicated service to our organization and tireless devotion to our community. Jim has served on the WK Chamber Board of Directors for many years and is currently the Secretary/Treasurer. In the past he has represented the Chamber on WUDAC, and completed the Senior Leadership Montgomery program. Jim puts a lot of effort into promoting the Chamber, and has recruited many new members. He conducts custom briefings and workshops with Onder Communications, his consulting business. Earlier in his career, Jim worked at the Dept. of Transportation, where he produced materials for safety and health issues. He was also the Managing Director of Audio-Visual Productions for the United Way of America, as well as a professor of communications.