



NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF PROFESSIONAL HISPANIC NRCS EMPLOYEES

Ray T. Margo

Awards Luncheon

San Antonio, Texas
June 8, 2018

Commemorating 25 Years

of Hispanic Advancement and Building for the Future



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of Hispanic Advancement and Building for the Future

National Organization of Professional
Hispanic NRCS Employees

Awards Luncheon

Opening Remarks

Rocemi Morales, NOPHNRCSE Executive Vice President
Master of Ceremonies

Invocation

Rocemi Morales

Ray T. Margo Biography

Minerva Margo

LUNCHEON

Keynote Speaker

Eldonna Lewis Fernandez
CEO of Dynamic Vision International, Inc.

Award Presentations

Michael Margo, NOPHNRCSE President
Yomarée S. Cortés-Díaz, NOPHNRCSE Award Committee Chair

2018 Farmer of the Year Conservation Award
2018 NOPHNRCSE Awards

Closing Remarks



In Memoriam

Ray T. Margo

June 4, 1934 – January 14, 2005

NOPHNRCSE honors Mr. Ray Margo with this annual luncheon to acknowledge Hispanic NRCS employees that represent the ideals and vision he believed in; thus, making him and his protégés leaders in agriculture.

Ray devoted his entire professional career as a public servant to the people of the United States. He received a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science from Texas A&M University in 1956. His career began with the USDA-Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in 1956 as a soil conservationist. Ray was a distinguished veteran, having served in the U.S. Army. During his time with the army, Ray completed a 16-month tour in Korea.

When Ray returned, he continued to work with the SCS all over South Texas before transferring to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he ultimately retired in 1993 as the State Conservationist.

Ray was recognized for his work with several achievement awards including USDA's Superior Service Award. He represented USDA on several foreign assignments including assignments to Portugal, Peru, Columbia, Chile, and Mexico. While in Mexico, he presented three papers at the first national Soil and Water Conservation Congress in Texcoco, Mexico.

He was active with the National Committee of Boy Scouts of America by serving on the Philmont Scout Ranch Committee. In 1993, he helped establish the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NOPHNRCSE), and became the organization's first interim president.

Keynote Speaker

Eldonna Lewis Fernandez



As CEO of Dynamic Vision International, Inc., Eldonna Lewis Fernandez dispenses leadership, negotiation, and communication training to corporate clients and small business owners internationally. Her business is built on a 23-year career as a contract specialist in the Air Force, where she negotiated hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of domestic and international contracts – everything from pens and paper to office machines, automotive parts, and aircraft maintenance.

After retiring from the Air Force, Eldonna spent 10 years as a contracts administrator, negotiator, and systems analyst for aerospace

companies such as Raytheon, Sparta, and Parsons. She worked with Raytheon and the U.S. Navy on the F-18 Radar program, and with Sparta and Parsons on satellite launch programs for the Space and Missile Systems Center at Los Angeles Air Force Base.

Today, her corporate workshops and keynotes cover a variety of topics – everything from negotiating skills to leading effective meetings and becoming a self-leader, which she defines as “asking for what you want, and owning the power to stand up for yourself.”

The award-winning speaker and author is one of 69 Toastmaster Accredited Speakers worldwide. She enlivens every keynote, workshop or breakout session with games or simulations. “You remember it because you’re experiencing the information rather than passively listening to it,” she says.

Eldonna has written two books: *Think Like A Negotiator ~ 50 Ways to Create Win-Win Results by Understanding the Pitfalls to Avoid* and *GoPINK Rules of Engagement: 5 Foundational Principles for Taking Control of the Handlebars of Your Life*. She also co-authored *Heart of a Military Woman*, a compilation of stories by, for, and about military women.

Among her many media credits, she has appeared on ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox Business, Fox News, and CNN, and has been published in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Forbes, and The Huffington Post.

2018 Farmer of the Year Conservation Award



Mr. Javier Mancha

Mr. Javier Mancha is a farmer and rancher in Eagle Pass, Texas. He was born in 1948 to Rosalia and Perfecto Mancha and was raised in the Barrio de San Luisito along with six brothers and sisters.

Javier worked long days at his parent's grocery store while attending school. He attended Sul Ross University in Alpine,

Texas where he majored in elementary bilingual education. Every weekend, while at the university, he would make the four-and-a-half-hour drive to Eagle Pass to cook the *barbacoa* that was sold at the grocery store.

When drafted to serve in Vietnam, Javier responded to his draft notice and proudly served his country in the U.S. Army 1st Logistical Command. He returned from Vietnam in 1969 and purchased his first 10 acres in the Rosita Valley. It was there he began farming and learned the skills, hardships, and rewards of farm life. In 1975, Javier entered into a Long-Term Agreement (LTA) with what was known as the USDA-Soil Conservation Service, now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Through this agreement, he started implementing conservation practices such as land leveling and critical land treatment. In 1983, those original 10 acres turned into 40. Javier also purchased 500 acres of abandoned irrigated pastureland about six miles south of El Indio, Texas.

Javier and his wife, Petra, have been married for 50 years. One of their proudest achievements is the fact that their farming and ranching business helped to pay the college tuition for their four daughters — Patricia, Leticia, Brenda, and Kina. Their daughter, Rosalia, died a few months after her birth. Javier and Petra have six grandchildren, with the newest addition to the family expected in October.

In addition to farming, Javier serves his community. He served the children of Eagle Pass as a second grade teacher for 28 years. He is the chairman of the Maverick County Soil and Water Conservation District #253, chairman of the Maverick County Water Improvement District #1, and head usher of the 8 a.m. mass at Sacred Heart Catholic Church. He also provides support for academic scholarships to local high school graduates who are pursuing the field of agriculture.

2018 NOPHNRCSE Award Recipients



Visionary Award

Milton Cortes

Milton Cortes is currently the acting State Soil Scientist in Raleigh, North Carolina. He was born in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, and was raised in Bayamon. Milton graduated from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez campus, with a major in agronomy and soils. Milton started his career with the Agriculture Extension Service in Toa Alta, Puerto Rico, where he served as an area agronomist for 9 years and provided service to 5 municipalities.

In 1990, Milton was hired as a soil scientist for the Soil Conservation Service in Bucks County, Pennsylvania and then in Montgomery County. In 1993, Milton transferred to Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, as the Lajas Valley soil survey project leader. He also served as resource soil scientist for most of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. While in Puerto Rico, Milton served as the liaison for the climate project in the U.S. Virgin Islands. He was responsible for data collection, project station maintenance, and data collector software programming and settings.

In 1997, Milton was transferred to North Carolina as the NRCS Assistant State Soil Scientist in Raleigh. In April of this year, Milton was designated acting State Soil Scientist for North Carolina. Milton has also worked on an intermittent detail for about 2 years in Honduras, providing soils and agronomy assistance after Hurricane Mitch under the U.S. Agency for International Development. He has served as acting State Soil Scientist in Florida, North Carolina, and Wyoming, and as acting team leader for the former MLRA 14 Regional Soil Survey Office.

Milton serves as a mentor to various soil scientists and soil conservationists.



NOPHNRCSE's Vision

*A professional organization working in harmony with
its partners for natural resources conservation.*



Leadership Award

Rafael Vega

Rafael Vega is originally from Lajas, Puerto Rico, but presently resides in Smithfield, North Carolina with his wife. He graduated with honors from the Inter American University of Puerto Rico with a bachelor's degree in environmental technology and a master's degree in environmental sciences. He began his career with USDA-NRCS in 2005 through the Student Career Employment Program.

In his 13 years with the agency, he has held a variety of positions including soil conservationist, district conservationist, and area easement specialist for the state of Indiana. In addition, Rafael has participated in many special projects including holding the positions of Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager, representative on the National Civil Rights Advisory Committee, Leadership Development Program Participant, and President of the Soil and Water Conservation Society–Hoosier Chapter.

As a NOPHNRCSE member, Rafael has served as Midwest representative, National Council member, and Scholarship Endowment committee chair. Rafael is currently the State Resource Conservationist for North Carolina. In his spare time, he enjoys reading, hiking, and traveling.



NOPHNRCSE's Mission

To motivate and mentor members for leadership roles to assist NRCS and partners in delivering natural resources conservation.



Outstanding Member Award

Bianca Diaz-Deliz

Bianca Diaz-Deliz is currently a soil conservationist in the Frenchtown field office in New Jersey. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, she earned her bachelor's degree in animal science from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez campus in 2014.

Her career with NRCS started after learning about the agency at a college job fair. In 2012,

Bianca was selected as a soil conservationist trainee for the Bangor, Maine field office — and in the summer of 2013, she worked at the field office in Augusta, Maine. When she returned to Puerto Rico for her senior year of college, Bianca worked at the Mayagüez and San Sebastian field offices in Puerto Rico. Upon graduation in 2014, she was offered the soil conservationist position in Augusta, Maine. In August 2015, Bianca moved to New Jersey to serve as a soil conservationist.

As a member of NOPHNRCSE, Bianca provided guidance during the planning and implementation of the 2017 *Leaders in Conservation* national training series, a joint effort with the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NRCS), National Organization of Professional Woman in NRCS (WiN), Asian Pacific Islander Organization (APIO), and the National Employee Development Center. In 2015, Bianca also participated as co-chair of the Program Agenda Committee and chair of the Moderator Committee during the NOPHNRCSE Leadership Training. Bianca has been on the NOPHNRCSE national council since 2016, and currently serves as vice-president.



*The purpose and goal of NOPHNRCSE is
to assist NRCS in the delivery of program benefits and services
to the Hispanic community.*



Amiga Award

Janella Cruz

Janella Cruz is presently a soil scientist and Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager (HEPM) in upstate New York. Janella is originally from Bayamón, Puerto Rico. She earned her bachelor's degree in environmental science with a minor in chemistry from Universidad Metropolitana in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Afterwards, Janella attended graduate school at New Mexico State University, studying soil

science and receiving a Master of Science in Agronomy with a minor in environmental management. During graduate school, Janella was elected to be the International Service Director (2005-2006) for the Rotaract Club, working on special projects for Centro Santa Catalina in Juarez, Mexico.

In 2009, Janella started her professional career with NRCS as a soil scientist in Rapid City, South Dakota. In 2010, Janella became a member of NOPHNCSE where she has served as secretary and currently serving as East Region representative. During her career, Janella worked in the MLRA soil survey office in Flagstaff, Arizona, where she also served as the Area 1 representative for the Civil Rights Advisory Committee. In early winter 2014, Janella got a promotion to the Paul Smiths MLRA Soil Survey Office in upstate New York. In 2015, she was selected to serve as the HEPM for New York State where she continues to promote outreach projects for the agency.



*Did you know NOPHNCSE launched a new website last month?
Check it out at www.nophnrcse.org*



Excellence in Natural Resources Conservation Award

Randal D. Blackwood

Randal Blackwood is currently the supervisory soil conservationist for a team in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. He received his bachelor's degree in forest management from North Carolina State University in 1994. He began his career in timber procurement, later taking on the responsibilities of managing six contract logging crews. This involved budgeting, contracting, and field inspections of approximately 12,000 acres of timberland for harvest each year. His last assignment with International Paper was in the role of geographic information systems (GIS) forester. In this position, he served as the GIS trainer for 30 employees and managed the inventory and mapping databases for 300,000 acres of company-owned timberland.

When an opportunity became available, he moved back to his fourth-generation family farm and began work with NRCS in North Carolina as a district conservationist in 2002. He is working in one of the 10 highest ranking counties in North Carolina, based on the 2014 Agricultural Census (1st in beef cattle, 2nd for dairy, and 6th for poultry).

Randal is an activist. He builds relations of trust, respect, and ethics — and he enjoys working with minority groups. Under the new “team approach,” Randal has supervisory responsibilities in Randolph, Rowan, and Davie counties. As an NRCS employee, he exemplifies outstanding service to NRCS around the nation, to our clients, and to science through developing and implementing the sound technology transferred on grazing land resources.



“Conservation is humanity caring for the future.”

— *Nancy Newhall*

NOPHNRCSE Snapshots



NOPHNRCSE Lifetime Members at the 2006 conference in Orlando, Florida.



1999 Awards Banquet in Las Vegas, Nevada.



2017 Awards Luncheon in Grapevine, Texas.



Field tour of Lake Apopka Restoration Area in Florida.



In Memoriam

Adolfo Perez, Jr.

October 14, 1954 – March 26, 2018





United States
Department of
Agriculture



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