

A. Heath Onthank Award Nomination

Richard (Ricardo) Caballos

Director of Southgate Community Center

Southgate Community Center (SCC) has evolved into a vibrant, connected community resource for the residents of the neighborhood. The single catalyst responsible for most of this transformation is Center Director Ricardo Caballos. This place is booming!

In his short tenure at Southgate, Ricardo has enacted changes that resulted in increased participation in the after school program for elementary school children, increased programs and participation of teens, increased adult and senior educational and recreational opportunities, strengthened existing partnerships with local agencies, and established new community partnerships with neighborhood agencies and programs.

Ricardo has a knack for bringing people together. He has developed new partnerships and strengthened ties with existing partners that have contributed to the programs and diversity at Southgate. Some of these partnerships include;

- Tzu Chi Buddhist Center members participated in Community Day in 2011. They enjoyed the program and center so much, they asked to "adopt" Southgate. Over the 2011 holiday season, the Tzu Chi Center contributed food baskets for 40 families in the neighborhood, each containing over 25 pounds of food.
- Reston Bible Church assisted with the Community Day celebration, conducted a community supper for neighborhood families, and assisted on service projects.
- Reston Community Center (RCC) has become more involved and sponsored a major service project to establish a library at Southgate. The senior woodshop participants built the bookcases now in the conference room. This project culminated with volunteers working to finish and install the bookcases as part of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration sponsored by RCC.
- Reston Association is frequently involved through the Southgate Community Center Advisory Committee and conducted with a participant survey at the 2011 Community Day that aided the Center's outreach efforts.

Under Ricardo's direction, Southgate has expanded the program offerings. The list of new program initiated is exhaustive, but just of few of the highlights are;

- Parenting classes for parents of preschoolers
- Teen Filmmaking
- Aces High Card Night for adults
- XMarks the Spot adult gaming night
- Teen Festival
- Haunted Halloween and Fall Festival
- Teen Cooking Classes

Salsa and Peruvian Dance classes.

As a former educator, I am most impressed with the growth of mentoring opportunities Ricardo has developed at the Center. South Lakes High School students continue to provide one-on-one tutoring on a regular basis. In addition, Ricardo initiated a new partnership with Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology called **GIVE** – Growth and Inspiration through Volunteering and Education. Every Saturday afternoon, TJ students visit the center for one-on-one session with Southgate children. And, a new program pairing Southgate 5th and 6th grade girls with older girls attending Langston Hughes Middle School began in 2011. **Big Hermanas and Little Sisters** leadership class assists the younger girls with their transition to middle school and helps them grow into leaders and confident young women.

The neighborhood has responded to the new attitude at Southgate. Participation numbers are up and continue to rise for the programs at SCC. After school program averaged 30 children a day in 2010, increased to average 48 by the end of 2011, and is up to 75 per day as of February 2011. Last year's Community Day grew from 500 participants in 2010 to 900 in 2011. Attendance is up in all age groups; elementary school children, teens, adults, and seniors. English as a Second Language (ESL) classes have been expanded and are frequently filled to capacity, as are adult computer classes. In fact, my office assisted in opening up street parking on Pinecrest because the parking lot at the Center simply could not accommodate the number of people utilizing Southgate on a daily basis.

Since opening in 2005, Southgate Community Center has struggled to develop the ties to the neighborhood that are hallmarks of a vibrant center that meets the needs of the community. I believe with Ricardo Caballos at the helm, the Southgate Community Center program has made tremendous strides in accomplishing this goal. I most enthusiastically recommend Ricardo Caballos for the 2011 A. Heath OnThank Award for 2011.

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