If you ask me, the folks in Hollywood who run the annual Academy Awards show could take a few lessons from Apopka. The Hope CommUnity Center’s Hope & Diversity Awards program on March 2 at Wekiva High School had it all over the Oscar telecast in terms of pure joy and inspiration. We even had our own real Oscar among the award recipients, too. He’s Oscar Aguirre, principal of Apopka’s Lovell Elementary School, one of four recipients along with Father Richard Walsh of St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church in Winter Park; Dora Casanova Nelson, CEO of La Prensa; and Dr. Kathryn Norsworthy of Rollins College in Winter Park.

The center created the Hope & Diversity Awards “to recognize individuals who are making a difference in our communities by building commUnity and enriching lives locally and globally,” and the excellent videos about each recipient, shown on a large screen during the evening, certainly bore that out. Watching the video tributes, we learned of Principal Aguirre’s efforts to reach the spirit of each child, Father Walsh’s lifelong dedication to service here and in Haiti, Ms. Nelson’s use of her business acumen to create change and opportunities, and Dr. Norsworthy’s rich career as an educator of great spirit, innovation, and courage.

This evening of sweet inspiration began with sweetness in tangible form. Before the performance, tables in the lobby brimmed with baked treats of amazing variety and goodness. Central Florida clearly has some bakers who could hold their own with the finest pastry shops around the world.

Then, in Wekiva High’s large, comfortable auditorium, the evening got underway with the welcome from emcee Giorgina Pinedo Rolon, a Hope CommUnity Center board member, and the entertainment began with another Welcome—performance poet and former Notre Dame Americorps volunteer Shawn Welcome moved us with the virtuosity of his rhythm and words.
A Very Good Start For 2013

Two members of the community of the Hope CommUnity Center were recently honored at the sixth “Mujeres Destacadas” gala of La Prensa. Nilka Melendez was chosen as a finalist from an impressive group of nominees of outstanding women who have contributed to our local Hispanic community. She was recognized for her work over the last 7 years with more than 350 youth. She is dedicated to developing leadership skills with teenagers and young adults, the majority of whom come from the immigrant community. Nilka Melendez has improved the lives of so many at the Hope CommUnity Center, but the director of youth services says she’s been the one whose life has been turned around through those experiences. Nilka commented “this was a great evening and I realize Ghandi is so right, when he said: Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

The second HCC person to be recognized was Karen Guzman. Karen was presented with a $5,000 scholarship by Jesse Gonzalez, who owns a local electrical company, Comelco Inc. The scholarship was in honor of Mr. Gonzalez’s mother, Aida Gonzalez. The money was raised by Mr. Gonzalez and several others involved with “Mujeres Destacadas.” Karen is in her second semester at Valencia College where she is maintaining a 4.25 gpa. Karen graduated from Apopka High School in 2012. Her long term career goal is to become a financial analyst.

Hope CommUnity Center was among the group of 59 nonprofits that received $1.5 million in grants through the Disney Helping Kids Shine Grants program. This initiative from Walt Disney World Resort supports organizations that help build strong futures for children in Central Florida. Hope CommUnity Center received $40,000 this year. We thank the Walt Disney Resort for its belief in our mission.

Did you know that for every dollar HCC raises 90 cents goes directly to program services?
More virtuosos followed, including guest choreographer Volante Jones and guitar wizard, John Valeri. We basked in beautiful music by Wekiva High math teacher Taryn Garland and moving performances by the Hope CommUnity Dancers, who showed amazing heart and professionalism for young women who are not professional dancers. Brava!

Each number brought a smile to my face or moved my heart in some way. And I loved the big limbo finale, including Sister Ann Kendrick rocking out in a traditional nun’s habit (or a facsimile of one).

I’m not sure who said it, but scribbled in the edges of my program for the evening are these words: “The pain of one is the pain of all, and the triumph of one is the triumph of all.” This wonderful evening offered potent proof through music, dance, visual images, and words that the work of hope, diversity, and commUnity are strong in Central Florida and beyond, through the Hope CommUnity Center and its awardees.

ARTICLE SUBMITTED BY JOY DICKINSON, FRIEND OF HOPE

NIGHT OF HOPE AND DIVERSITY RAISES $29,000 FOR HCC’S SCHOLARSHIP FUND! THANK YOU!

Current Recipients and College Students
In Spanish there is a single word – “Kermes” - which means: a market or fair to raise money for a good cause...and boy did Hope CommUnity Center put on one heck of a Kermes on March 23! The fun was organized by the Community Advisory Board, a group of adults, themselves participants in many HCC activities. They planned fun for the kids – a bouncy house, face painting, several raffles, music with a live DJ, dancing and a performance by HCC’s Sin Fronteras Dance Group. Perhaps the star of the event was the amazing Mexican food people made and sold during the event...tostadas, posole, tortas, tamales, and arroz con carne. Committee members each donated the food and supplies so that virtually all proceeds – some $3,800 – would be available to pay several high school students during the summer who serve as counselors in HCC’s Kids Camp for at-risk elementary school-age children. This is one more example of how the community works together to help one another, creates leadership opportunities for youth, fun for the children and makes a party for all in the process!

Sunday, January 27 a group of students travelled to St. Petersburg to attend an Open House at the University of South Florida’s St. Petersburg campus. The students were impressed with the beauty of this campus which is located directly on Tampa Bay. Forty-four hundred undergraduate students provide a small private college atmosphere for the tuition of a state school.

The students’ favorite presentation was from the College of Arts and Science. The students learned about the importance of applying in the first semester of their senior year to be eligible for in-house scholarships. They left knowing that the average gpa for admitted students is 3.5.

Some of the comments on the ride centered on how they would change their freshman year in high school if they knew then what they know now about the importance of earning A’s and B’s in their academic classes.

College and Career Access member, Alfonso, remarked that the campus felt homey and comfortable yet offered many different areas of study.

April Birthdays
16  Julie Bittner
19  Sr. Maureen White
21  Michael Cantillo
26  Laura Firtel

May Birthdays
4  Sr. Gail Grimes
7  Liz Ortel
11  Anabel Romero
Danny Franco, a member of our Sin Fronteras youth group spoke about being an angry young man who did not have a positive outlook on life or the future when he came to HCC. He said that joining the youth group at HCC was the beginning of his transformation. Today he is a confident young man with goals and dreams. He applied and was granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which gave him a work permit, a social security number and allowed him to take the test for a driver’s license. Today he is studying to be a graphic designer. He is an inspiration through his personal perseverance in very challenging times and his dedication to helping others.

Sister Ann Kendrick, HCC Foundress, began her talk by quoting A Tale of Two Cities, “It is the best of times and it is the worst of times. This story continues today with a world and a people, not too far from here. People facing poverty, racism, abuse, lack of hope, trauma, and cultural integration challenges. We empower people. We invite them to the table to help restore relationships, and rebuild broken communities and work toward an inclusive community of compassionate care.”

Eli Garcia took the stage and defined life at the Hope CommUnity Center “as the Dream to Change and the Desire to Give.” She said, “that HCC helps individuals discover their hidden talents. At HCC, dreams can become reality because it is a place where they never give up on anyone and where nothing is impossible. We have a desire to give back because we care about the needs of the community.”

Mary Carroll, HCC board member, spoke about how HCC transformed her life, “There is not a day at Hope that I do not experience personal transformation or the observation of others being enlightened and empowered.” She made a decision 12 years ago to become an investor in HCC. “Each day there is a new gain for me and for others whose lives touch us or whose lives we’ve touched.” As part of the program, Mary asked each of the guests to reach into their hearts and share their time, talents and resources.

The event would not have been a success without our sponsors: Rollins College, Orlando Magic, Panera Bread, HCC’s Board of Directors, River Walk Dentistry, Certified Financial Group, Robert McIntosh, Regis Simasek, Wayne Fire Extinguishers and our in-kind sponsor Metro Vista Printing and pianist, Jay Hughes.

We thank each of you who attended and Fr. Walsh and St. Margaret Mary of Winter Park for donating space. We look forward to seeing you next year. For more information about this event, donating to HCC or coming in for a tour, call Michael Cantillo at 407 880 4673 or email mcantillo@hcc-offm.org.

With Spring upon us, new beginnings on the walls are blossoming at HCC. For HCC that means a new project! Youth, staff and members of the community have started to diligently prepare for a mosaic that will be placed right outside the entrance of the front doors. Hope CommUnity Center in conjunction with ArtReach Orlando, a non-profit dedicated to the empowerment of underserved communities through art, will create a story telling mosaic about peoples’ “Journey.” This theme of a journey will be expressed visually with personal objects donated by community members. Stay tuned! We will keep you updated with this project’s progress.
Olivia Reyes came to Florida with her husband in 1998 from the city of Pachuca in Hidalgo, Mexico. Their first stop was Miami, where she had family living. Olivia did not know a word of English at the time, but she began to study almost immediately.

A woman of great strength, courage and commitment to justice, Olivia became active with the Farmworker Association of Florida (FWAF), one of Hope CommUnity Center’s sister organizations that was (and is) working to improve conditions, pay and safety for farm workers. Having met “the Sisters” through her service with the FWAF, when she and her husband decided to leave Miami, they chose Apopka. Today, Olivia serves as the receptionist at Hope CommUnity Center. She is the first and last face people see when they come here; and she is a big part of why people say they feel so welcomed when they come to HCC. In 2012, HCC served over 5,900 people. Virtually all of them were greeted and attended to by Olivia who offers a friendly face and a warm presence to all who pass through HCC’s doors.

As Olivia says, “I love helping the people with their necessities because I know about that. I am part of the community. They are like me.”

Olivia is mother to three beautiful children: Joe, Jonathan and Yesenia. She hosts a Notre Dame Americorps volunteer in her home and when college students come to Apopka for service learning/immersion experiences, some of them stay with Olivia and her family. HCC is blessed to have Olivia as part of our staff as well as being a strong link with the community HCC serves.

Bob and Gail Lippincott reflect the broad range of educational backgrounds our volunteers have at HCC. Both have unique abilities and both are an asset to our program because of this.

Gail first came to our organization looking to volunteer as a potential grant-writer. She started volunteering in HCC’s English program, working with advanced adult English students writing articles for a newsletter. Today she is working with our GED students on mastering the essay portion of the GED, (one of the most-feared exams of the test!).

Gail provides an essential service to HCC students, many of whom are former English students but have never written a complete essay in English. Gail makes achieving this challenging task a real possibility for our students, putting them at ease with her friendly demeanor. According to her students, “She makes writing fun!”

Eventually, Gail convinced her husband to come check us out. He has become one of HCC’s favorite math tutors, working one-on-one with students who are fine-tuning their math skills for the GED Test. (probably the second most-feared section of the GED)

A visual thinker, he is able to show students math processes in a more concrete way, helping them grasp basic concepts that they may have missed in school.

In addition, Bob makes sure students understand the problem solving skills necessary to be efficient test-takers.

We thank Bob and Gail for their countless hours of service to HCC’s GED students and the program. You are making a real difference!
**Hope Shares Good News**

Since August 2012 undocumented students have been able to apply for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) which grants them, if approved, a social security number, a work permit and allows her to take the test for a driver’s license. The application process is slow and costs nearly $500. Astrid Rodriguez proudly shows her identification card which she received in April. She is a student at Seminole State College.

**The Way of the Cross**

On Friday, March 29, 2013 at St. Francis Catholic Church in Apopka, community members and staff of Hope CommUnity Center presented, “The Way of the Cross of the Migrant Jesus.” For Catholics, the Stations of the Cross is one of the most dramatic and significant traditions of the Holy Week rituals. Sr. Ann Kendrick and Nilka Melendez prepared the readings, songs and prayers for the evening. Staff, youth and community members participated in the readings and presentation of each station. Haitians, Philipinos, and Hispanics shared their immigration stories.

The ritual emphasized the gospel narrative of the final steps of Jesus and how the suffering face of Jesus is found today in the immigrant community. Beautiful posters made by youth and staff members depicted present day themes of oppression and suffering of the poor, especially immigrant people. A 15th station illustrated Jesus’ resurrection. Those attending heard a message of God inviting us to fight for life, for the rights and dignity of all human beings, and for the reign of peace, love, justice and freedom that Jesus proclaimed. The celebration ended with a prayer for all communities and people who are living the difficult experience of migration and for those who work with them to build a better world.

**Easter Made Special Because of the Generosity of the Flor Foundation**

On Saturday, March 30, the Flor Foundation provided an Easter party for the community. Attractions included face painting, an Easter Egg Hunt, a bouncy house and other games. Children received Easter Egg baskets and families received baskets of food provided by HCC. Activities were followed with a luncheon given by the foundation.

The Flor Foundation is a non profit organization that collaborates regularly with Hope. Thirty Flor members and 20 volunteers from HCC worked together to make a beautiful day for over 90 families.

Members of the foundation are people of faith, who believe in the goodness of God and of people. Before leaving one member commented, “Hope is a place where lives are changed.” Hope considers it a great blessing to work together with the Flor Foundation to make a big celebration of life and of Easter for the Hope community.
We are launching our new website May 1, 2013. Please see our new look at our same address www.hcc-offm.org. Hope thanks volunteer, Sandy Lipten for her expertise and patience in guiding us through this process. She and her husband, Mark also take care of the children during HCC’s Adult English students.

Hope CommUnity Center has been working with the Central Florida immigrant community for over 41 years. Help us continue the legacy of the Sisters by ensuring the future of HCC. To do so we must rely on the yearly support of donors like you. We are always looking to the future and trying to create sustainable funding which will allow HCC to exist for years to come.

Did you know that you can support the work of Hope CommUnity Center by making a Planned Gift to our organization? You can name Hope CommUnity Center in your estate plans by including some simple language in your will or trust.

For more information on how you can create a Legacy of Hope, please contact Michael Cantillo at 407.880.4673 Ext: 227.