



Woman of the Year
Thelma Melendez de Santa Ana



Alicia Abella



Ignacia Moreno



Annual Woman of The Year Issue

Progress of Hispanic women slowed by economic downturn, but ascent continues

by ROB KUZNIA, Staff Writer

Widespread progress for Hispanic women in America was slow to begin, but has been quick to accelerate.

Every April, **HispanicBusiness** magazine tracks this progress, and recognizes the strides made by some

of this nation's outstanding Hispanic women.

The goal of this issue is not necessarily to highlight the achievements of the most widely recognized Hispanic women, such as Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, whose Senate confirmation to the bench last year



Carmen Nazario



Carmen Ortiz

triggered a frenzy of media attention.

Rather, the idea is to spotlight some of the unsung heroes – the Hispanic women whose tremendous achievements are perhaps less well-known but absolutely invaluable.

Not until 1992, for instance, was the first Hispanic woman elected to Congress. Today there are six Hispanic women in Congress. And from 1970 to 2007, the share of Hispanic women in the workforce rose from 40 percent to 54 percent.

But there's still a long way to go. After all, there are 535 members of Congress, and Hispanic women remain the lowest-paid group in America. What's more, the down economy of the past couple of years has served to slow the speed of progress.

But in the long view, the steady rise of Hispanic women in America continues.

This year's Woman of the Year is Thelma Melendez de Santa Ana, who is among the nation's highest-ranking education officials. As the U.S. Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, Ms. Melendez is the Chief Advisor to U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan on all matters related to preschool, elementary and secondary education. In 2009, she was named California's Superintendent of the Year.

She refers to her career as an "occu-passion."

"I never in my life would have imagined I'd be here," she told **HispanicBusiness** magazine. "I feel a deep sense of respect for the opportunity that the President and Secretary [of Education] have given me."

In addition to Ms. Melendez, the other finalists this year included Alicia Abella, the Executive Director of the Innovative Services Research Department at AT&T; Ignacia S. Moreno, Assistant U.S. Attorney General for the Environment and Natural Resources Division; Carmen

Nazario, Assistant Secretary for Children and Families with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services; and Carmen Ortiz, U.S. Attorney for the District of Massachusetts.

Through the prism of the lasting economic slump, the rise of Hispanic women in America has been tempered. Unemployment among Hispanic women hit a troubling peak in April of 2009, nearing 13 percent – up from about 7 percent in 2000 – though it has since settled back to about 11 percent, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

Hispanic men also suffer from the slump, with an unemployment rate which surpassed that of Hispanic women for the first time, in December of 2007. The rate remains higher today, at 13.9 percent.

"More and more families are relying on the earnings of women," explained Jeffrey Hayes, Senior Research Associate with the Institute for Women's Policy Research, in conversation with **HispanicBusiness** Magazine. "It's not just supplementary income anymore."

Undeniably, it's been a tough

couple of years for men and women of all backgrounds.

Still, despite the setbacks, the milestones among Hispanic women pioneers are becoming more and more frequent and prestigious.

They include the first astronaut (1993), the first president of Purdue University (2007), the first leader of a California State University campus (2007), the first U.S. Labor Secretary (2009), and, most famously, the first U.S. Supreme Court Justice (2009).

These women are the bellwethers for the future success of other Hispanic women. However, on a widespread scale, there is still a lot of catching up to do.

In 2008, the median weekly earnings of Hispanic women (\$501) was surpassed by that of women of other races. Specifically, Asian (\$753), white (\$654) and black (\$554) women, according to a July report by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Also, among women, Hispanics in 2008 were less likely than all other groups to be employed in management or professional jobs, at 24 percent. This is behind Asian women (46 percent), white women »

Women of Excellence

In addition to the five women featured in this issue, here are the other finalists to round out our Top 20.

Rose T. Andrade

Senior VP, Credit Portfolio Information Services, Credit Risk & Reporting Division at Union Bank of California.

Norma V. Cantu

Professor of Law and Education at UT Austin.

Yvette Donado

Senior Vice President of People, Process & Communications and Chief Administrative Officer at Educational Testing Service.

Yvette Sanchez Fuentes

Director, Office of Head Start at National Head Start Association.

Yolanda Garcia Olivarez

Regional Administrator, Region VI, at US Small Business Administration.

Ana Hooper

Vice President of Total Quality, Darden Restaurants.

Sindy Marisol Benavides

Director of Community Outreach & Voting at Democratic National Committee.

Annette R. Martinez

Vice President of Operations-Human Resources at State Farm.

Ana J. Matosantos

Director at California Department of Finance.

Jennifer Millier

Vice President, Mission Critical Business Solutions, Business Critical Systems, at Hewlett-Packard Company.

Yvette Ostolaza

Litigation Partner at Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP.

Zenia Raudsepp

Vice President, Human Resources Business Partner at Freddie Mac.

Carol A. Robles-Roman

Deputy Mayor for Legal Affairs and Counsel to the Mayor, Office of the New York City Mayor.

Violeta Vera Seidell

Vice President, Lodging Program Management Office at Marriott International.

Alicia Villarreal

Partner at Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP.



Ignacia Moreno

Former corporate attorney now protects America's environmental interests

By JOSHUA MOLINA
Deputy Managing Editor

As the nation's Assistant Attorney General in the Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division, Ignacia Moreno is in charge of enforcing the country's environmental laws.

Ms. Moreno manages 700 employees and has about 7,500 cases on her desk, on everything from enforcement actions related to clean air and drinking water, to property ownership disputes. It's a huge task, but defending the country's interests is part of Ms. Moreno's core: at age six, she emigrated from Colombia, and has a great sense of obligation and duty to the U.S.

"I find myself one of the luckiest women in the world to have come into the Justice Department," said Ms. Moreno, one of **HispanicBusiness** magazine's 2010 women of the year. "The first day that I walked into this building, I saw a picture of President Barack Obama next to a picture of Attorney General Eric Holder, and to this day, I get goosebumps. Never did I think this day would arrive."

During the Clinton Administration, she served as Counsel to the Assistant Attorney General, also within the Environment and Natural Resources Division. In that capacity she helped manage employees, led domestic and international environmental enforcement initiatives, and expanded and managed the Division's international programs.

"Ignacia is a great asset to the Department," said Thomas Perrelli, her current supervisor. "She is smart and incredibly hard-working. Her dedication to the Division and the Department, and her professionalism, shine through in every dealing you have with her."

In the private sector, Ms. Moreno has also set trends.

From 2001 to 2006, Ms. Moreno was a partner at Spriggs & Hollingsworth in Washington, D.C., specializing in environmental and mass tort litigation, with an emphasis on science-based advocacy. From 2006 until last year's confirmation with the Obama Administration, she was counsel of Corporate Environmental Programs at General Electric.

Ms. Moreno has also served pro bono as General



Counsel to the Hispanic National Bar Association.

"She is not only a leading expert in the field of environmental law, but she is also one of a small number of attorneys of color in this substantive area that impacts the Latino community, and all Americans," said Alejandra Y. Castillo, Co-Chair of the Hispanic National Bar Association's Executive Endorsements Committee, at the time of her appointment.

As she partakes in round two of her White House experience, stepping up enforcement is one of Ms. Moreno's priorities in the current administration.

"We are working very closely to address air pollution and water pollution problems," Ms. Moreno said. "We are establishing an environmental crimes task force so that we can pool our resources, so that we can address some flagrant violations of the law."

Much of her inspiration traces back to her childhood experiences in Harlem.

"Patriotism was an important bedrock," Ms. Moreno said. "We wanted to be part of this country. We wanted to learn English and we wanted to embrace this incredible opportunity that we have been presented. If we made something of ourselves, we knew we had to come back and give to our country." ■