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Role models honored at Hispanic breakfast

By [Allecia Vermillion](#)
STAFF WRITER

AURORA — Role models don't usually make speeches about doing poorly in school.

Or their lurid romantic entanglements.

For Marsha Jordan, these details were just some of the memorable moments in a life and television career that landed her in front of the podium as the keynote speaker at the city's Hispanic Heritage Advisory Board community breakfast Friday.

Jordan, an Aurora native, has won a Midwest Emmy award for her work writing and producing at ABC-7 TV news. It's a world away from her days as a sometimes-troubled student when Hispanics were more rare in Aurora and classmates were curious to know, "Are you a Mexican?"

In the course of her work, Jordan told the audience of 500, she has hobnobbed with celebrities, danced with actor John Travolta and has "done a lot of auditioning" in an elusive quest for the right man.

Aurora is "where I discovered the path to find my true home," Jordan said. "One that goes far beyond geography. "

Role models were the theme of this year's community breakfast, and Jordan told younger audience members that a successful path in life can take many forms.

She spun stories of her escapades in several local Catholic schools, before finishing up at West Aurora High School, where teachers exposed her to her beloved literature. There was Holy Angels School, where the nuns "were all Sister Mary Something," or Rosary High School where "they went crazy over how long your skirt was," even if there were no boys around.

Jordan is also the daughter of Hector Jordan, another Hispanic role model. Aurora's first minority police officer, he later became a top federal narcotics agent but was beaten to death in 1970 during a confrontation with seven men after a family party in Aurora.

"Where we're going didn't come without a struggle," said Michael Nila, a retired Aurora Police Department commander and Hector Jordan's nephew.

Eliseo Martinez, an East Aurora High School senior, thought Marsha Jordan's speech was "very relatable." He attended the breakfast to receive a leadership award for academics.

"She doesn't try to be a role model; it's almost a given," he said.

Thanks to Engbarth

The event also honored Rev. David Engbarth, the longtime pastor at St. Nicholas Catholic Church in Aurora. Engbarth received the Pete Perez Award, given for contribution to quality of life in the Hispanic Community. Its namesake, Pete Perez, was born to immigrant parents and went on to become a leader in law enforcement in Aurora and Kane County.

"What a pleasurable licentiousness!" Engbarth said, borrowing a phrase from Marsha Jordan's speech, although perhaps with a different meaning.

The banquet hall at Gaslite Manor was filled with red, yellow and black balloons, pictures of famous Hispanic role models, and a host of gaily decorated pictures of pinatas.

The artwork was the creation of local students from kindergarten through second grade and part of the event's art contest. Participants received an outline of a pinata and decorated it however they chose.

Third through fifth graders took part in an essay contest, researching an author, inventor or family member who has been a Hispanic role model.

Local Hispanic high school students received scholarships for leadership and service. Honorees included a former gang member now excelling in school, the founder of a Hispanic sorority chapter, a student with a staggering 7.6 grade point average and a junior ROTC member with a hefty collection of ribbons adorning his jacket.

Event organizer Rosalinda Martinez told the teens, "You make the City of Aurora proud, and also your Hispanic heritage."

Student award winners

•Art Contest

First Place: Brian Estrada, 2nd grade, Hermes School; Bertha Gutierrez, 2nd grade, Hermes School

Second Place: Stephanie Liu, 1st grade, White Eagle School; Leticia Jaime, 2nd grade, Hermes School

Third Place: Jocelyn Elizalde, kindergarten, Dieterich School; Robert Marquez, 2nd grade, Lincoln School

•Essay Contest

First Place: Ricardo Alcantar, 5th grade, Beaupre School

Second Place: Jessica Ortiz, 5th grade, Brady School

Third Place: Miguel Chavez, 5th grade, Oak Park School; Stephanie Contreras, 3rd grade, Hermes School

•Youth Leadership Awards

Academics: Mario Elias, junior, West Aurora High School; Aracely Rios, junior, East Aurora High School; Rachel Reyna, senior, Rosary High School; Silvia Aguilar, sophomore, Waubensee Community College; Eliseo Martinez, senior, East Aurora High School

School Community: Alfredo Vazquez, senior, East Aurora High School; Silvia Aguilar, sophomore, Waubensee Community College; Daniel Hernandez, senior, Marmion Academy

Aurora Community: Jessica Nunez, senior, Rosary High School; Aracely Rios, junior, East Aurora High School

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