NEA recognizes Omaha’s Latino Peace Officers Association for building positive community relations
Annual gala also marks 50th anniversary of the NEA Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner

BOSTON—For its efforts and success in constructing positive relations between communities of color and law enforcement in Omaha, Nebraska, in the midst of tense times between the two in other parts of the country, NEA bestowed upon the Latino Peace Officers (LPOA) Association of Omaha its prestigious NEA George I. Sánchez Award.

Since 1967, NEA has recognized and honored those who have fought — and continue to fight — for human and civil rights. This year, NEA honored the outstanding work of 12 American social justice heroes at its annual Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner on Saturday, July 1, in Boston. The theme of the awards dinner is, “Living the Legacy: After 50 Years, Still We Rise.”

“The Latino Peace Officers Association embodies the spirit of Dr. Maya Angelou’s beloved poem ‘Still I rise,’” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García. “Through their deeds and actions, these human and civil rights heroes are still rising and carrying the torch forward. Tonight, we renew our commitment to stand for racial and social justice and pledge to continue to shed a light on their work as they guide and inspire us all.”

Founded 15 years ago in South Omaha, where a large number of low-income families of color live, the LPOA’s influence has spread throughout the city. Through their school visits, athletic programs, and Christmas and Easter events, the police officer volunteers in the LPOA are spreading a positive message to youth: “We care about you, we believe in you, and we are going to help you stay in school and out of gangs and away from drugs.”

The LPOA created free baseball and soccer leagues for families who could not afford baseball or soccer teams with uniforms, and police officers serve as coaches and mentors for the children. There are 13,600 soccer players and 1,050 baseball players in LPOA’s racially diverse leagues. On any given night in the summer, Latino, Sudanese, Somali, African American and White youths play and have fun together on the LPOA league fields.

It is through these vital programs and activities that the LPOA creates improved human relations with the community at large. Promoting empathy and understanding through healthy dialogue and interaction, LPOA members teach children that human and civil rights are paramount in life. Since the outset of LPOA, gang recruitment in South Omaha is down more than 70 percent and violent crimes related to gangs is down 85 percent.

Watch how the LPOA has built bridges of empathy to Omaha’s children of color by supporting youth soccer and baseball as well as Christmas and Easter events. To read LPOA’s full bio, please click here.

NEA also recognized the anniversary of its merger with the American Teachers Association, which represented black teachers in segregated schools. ATA originally created the Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner, and, as part of the merger, NEA continues this important tradition 50 years later.

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