



Jessica Segura
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Valenzuelas chosen as Family of the Year

Couple's contributions to youth, community no longer under radar

The 6th annual Mid-Valley Interfaith Council — Coachella Valley Family of the Year award is going to Victor and Diane Valenzuela of Indio.

The couple was chosen from among eight other families, officials said.

"The Valenzuelas were chosen due to their commitment to each other as a family, education, community service, culture and good work ethics," said Bebe Green, president of Mid-Valley Interfaith Council.

The Valenzuelas will receive a plaque on Monday at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Palm Desert.

They were chosen by the council, which is "composed of 18 representatives from different faiths and 20 congregations in the Coachella Valley," Green said.

The Valenzuelas have three daughters: Elaine Valenzuela, 28, a fashion designer in San Francisco; Nastassia Valenzuela, 24, a student at San Francisco State University working on her bachelor's degree in science; and Vanessa Valenzuela, 22, who lives in Chicago and is pursuing a degree as a mechanical engineer at Northwestern University.

Victor and Diane Valenzuela were notified on March 20 that they were chosen as the model family of the Coachella Valley.

"We were shocked because my husband and I give back to the community under the radar," said Diane Valenzuela, 45.

Diane Valenzuela has been giving back to the community for years. In the past she was a member of the board for the Blood Bank, was on the committee for the American Cancer Relay for Life since its inception, and is now serving on the board of Dr. Carreon's Scholarship Foundation.

"The foundation gives scholarships to children of Hispanic decent," she said. "I'm also currently working with the Coachella Valley Unified School District operations graduation" to help increase the number of high school graduates.

Diane Valenzuela is the vice president, resident director and senior financial adviser for Merrill Lynch.

As she sat in her leather chair in her Rancho Mirage office recently, she talked about the different philanthropic trips she has made to Central America and other humanitarian efforts.

"I went to Guatemala (in December) with my daughter and we helped build an orphanage," she said.

There was another trip where she brought along a group of La Quinta High School senior girls.

"We took six kids to New York and Massachusetts and visited six colleges," she said. "We called this their senior trip."

It's important, she said, to encourage children and teens to pursue higher education.

"No one can take that away from you," she said. "I think the issue here is experience — the more informed you are, the better decisions you can make."

She and her husband have raised three successful, college-educated daughters.

While she says they embrace each one's individuality, "They all had the same opportunities and expectations, though."

Additional Facts

If you go

What: Victor and Diane Valenzuela will be awarded the Coachella Valley Family of the Year award.

Who: The Valenzuelas were chosen by the Mid-Valley Interfaith Council.

When: 7 p.m. Monday

Where: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 72-960 Park View Drive, Palm Desert.

Cost: Admission is free and open to the public.

Info: (760) 328-1940 or (760) 346-7207