



The Desert Sun  
January, 2010  
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## An Indio man who encouraged local Mexican-Americans to pursue higher education will be honored later this month by the Palm Springs Human Rights Commission.

Martin Martinez, former executive director of the Carreon Foundation, will receive a Community Award during the commission's Jan. 11 meeting at Palm Springs City Hall.

For 15 years, Martinez was director of the scholarship organization that gave out at least \$1 million to hundreds of Mexican-American students.

"I felt very, very proud of what I have done," Martinez, 67, said last week. "But I never did this for myself. I did everything for our community."

The commission gives the award each year to people who have had an impact on human rights issues, Chairman Jerry Trussell said.

"We felt that education is so important to the whole topic of human rights issues," he said. Martinez's "work in directing that organization and the many scholarships that he has been responsible for is worthy of recognition."

Martinez, who owns a tax assistance and insurance agency in Indio, befriended ophthalmologist and physician Reynaldo Carreon Jr. He agreed with Carreon's philosophy about the importance of a higher education.

"(Carreon) would tell me it was the only way for our people to get anywhere — with a college education," he said.

Before Carreon died in 1991, he established a scholarship foundation for Mexican-American youth. Martinez served on the foundation's board of directors and then became an executive director of the organization in 1994.

But Martinez did so much more than hand out checks, those who know him said.

He visited schools and encouraged thousands of students to go to college. He checked in with the

recipients regularly.

One of those students was Raul Ruiz, a Carreon Foundation scholarship recipient from Coachella Valley High School in 1989. He is now an emergency physician at Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage.

Ruiz received \$500 from the Carreon Foundation to attend UCLA to become a physician. He also received "continuous encouragement" from Martinez.

"I grew up in a community where the norm was not to go to college or pursue a higher education," Ruiz said. "But Martinez was a pioneer in the Latino community because he always advocated youth."

Martinez retired this year from the Carreon Foundation because of health issues. He was honored at a luncheon in early December surrounded by family and former scholarship recipients.

"His greatest impact on the students was being able to motivate them to stay in school and give back to the community," said foundation executive director Gloria Margarita.