

Long Beach Press-Telegram: Reyna Ochoa honored with Gene Lentzner Award for neighborhood leadership

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With Reyna Ochoa as she received the Gene Lentzner Human Relations award at the CCEJ lunch at The Reef restaurant Wednesday (Oct. 30) are her parents, Jose and Esperanza Ochoa. Photo Courtesy of CCEJ.

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When she was born as their first child, she gave her parents such great joy that they named her Reyna, which means queen in Spanish.

“She was our queen then, and she still is,” said Jose Ochoa as he and his wife, Esperanza, proudly posed with their daughter who had just received the coveted Gene Lentzner Human Relations Award at the annual lunch of the California Conference for Equality and Justice last week at The Reef restaurant.

Lentzner, the legendary Long Beach civil rights leader was one of the original founders of CCEJ.

He died at 97 in 2020.

The Lentzner award is given annually to a grassroots leader who exemplifies Lentzner’s lifelong commitment to bringing diverse people together to improve human relations in Long Beach.

“Gene’s spirit lives on with this award,” said Lexie Nguyen, CCEJ emcee.

“I am so honored to get this award with Gene Lentzner’s name on it,” Reyna Ochoa said.

“Gene’s legacy is that we should all work together.”

Working together with people is what Reyna has been doing for most of her 49 years.

“It’s in my blood to help people whenever I can,” she said in an interview after the lunch.

“I’ve been married for 32 years with three children, and I know the struggles of raising a family,” she said. “My heart wants to help however I can.”

For more than a decade, Reyna has been working for the city of Long Beach in its Neighborhood Leadership program where she supports and mentors residents who are developing their passion for community service.

“I get great satisfaction out of seeing people from different walks of life working together to help themselves and others,” she said.

She also co-founded the Sunny Central Neighborhood Association in Central Long Beach, which is working to address local concerns. She said the association works on different projects from cleaning up trash to providing food for those in need.

Reyna was born at LA Harbor General Hospital in 1974, the first of five daughters born to her parents who had emigrated to Southern California from Mexico.

Raised in Long Beach, she attended Emerson Elementary School, Stanford Middle School and Wilson High School.

With support from her parents, she attended CCEJ’s Building Bridges Camp as a high school student and became a youth leader.

“This experience motivated her to return as an adult facilitator multiple times after receiving the facilitator training through CCEJ. Believing in the power of the organization, she later became a camp co-director,” CCEJ said in a statement.

After working in different sales jobs and getting married, Reyna began working for the city.

“I just love what I do, both working for the city and the Sunny Central Neighborhood Association,” she said. For more information, she said you can call her at 562-396-4098 or email her at sunnycentral.assoc@gmail.com.

At the lunch, CCEJ also honored Dr. Rashida Crutchfield of CSULB with its Humanitarian Award for her work in studying and promoting economic, food and housing justice and the Building Bridges Award to NewGround, a Muslim-Jewish partnership for change.

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