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MAYOR BLOOMBERG KICKS OFF THE 10TH ANNUAL IMMIGRANT HERITAGE WEEK CELEBRATION

Mayor Presents American Dreamer Awards to New Yorkers Improving the Lives of Immigrants

National Park Service Teams Up with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to Bring Hurricane Damaged Ellis Island Immigration Museum Programs to the Five Boroughs

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Fatima Shama today kicked off Immigrant Heritage Week at Gracie Mansion. Immigrant Heritage Week is a citywide celebration, from April 17-24, honoring the experiences and contributions of the millions of immigrants who have shaped New York City for generations. During the reception at Gracie Mansion, the Mayor announced the 2013 recipients of the American Dreamer Awards, presented to five New Yorkers dedicated to improving the lives of immigrant communities across the City. In addition, three new Rising Star Awards were presented to students that show promise as American Dreamers for their work to advance the lives of their fellow students. This year's Immigrant Heritage Week will focus on showcasing the stories of the millions of immigrants who passed through Ellis Island to start their lives in New York City and cities across the United States. With Ellis Island closed due to damage it suffered during Hurricane Sandy, the City will work with the National Park Service to bring the stories of immigrants from Ellis Island to communities across the City. National Park Service Rangers from the Ellis Island Immigration Museum Workshops will hold over twenty educational programs at schools, community and cultural institutions across the five boroughs during Immigrant Heritage Week. Mayor Bloomberg and Commissioner Shama were joined at Gracie Mansion by David Luchsinger, Superintendent of the Statue of Liberty National Monument and Steve Briganti, President and CEO of the Statue of Liberty- Ellis Island Foundation and the National Park Service Rangers who will lead the programs across New York City.

“In New York City we’ve always known how important immigrants are to this country,” said Mayor Bloomberg. “That’s why we have been a leading voice in the fight to fix America’s broken immigration system. We are very optimistic that a compromise immigration reform bill has attracted bi-partisan support in Washington. This bill could give millions of hard-working people the chance to realize their American dreams and go a long way towards strengthening our economy, our democracy and our communities. Our diversity, our tolerance and our spirit of mutual respect is part of what makes this City so great. That’s what we hope to highlight during Immigrant Heritage

(more)

Week and it's the reason we our City continues to attract people from around the world looking to build a better future.”

“To celebrate the rich cultural heritage of our City, this Immigrant Heritage Week we are working with the National Park Service to feature the stories of millions of immigrants who passed through Ellis Island with dreams that are as alive in immigrants today as they were a hundred years ago,” said Commissioner Shama. “It is those dreams and commitment to success that makes New York City better every day, and it is what we continue to celebrate today as we recognize our American Dreamer Awardees.”

“We are thrilled to join Mayor Bloomberg and the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs on this initiative, and to celebrate our immigrant heritage and the rich diversity our city and country enjoys,” said National Park Service Superintendent Luchsinger.

Established by Mayor Bloomberg in 2004, Immigrant Heritage Week is celebrated around April 17th, the day in 1907 when more immigrants entered through Ellis Island than any other date in the City’s history. This year, Immigrant Heritage Week will take place from April 17th – 24th. Immigrant Heritage Week was made an annual celebration by Executive Order 128, signed by Mayor Bloomberg in 2009. It is a citywide celebration honoring the experiences and contributions of the millions of immigrants who have shaped our City for generations. During Immigrant Heritage Week, the Department of Cultural Affairs' NYCulture Calendar will feature arts and cultural organizations hosting events during the week that feature immigrant artists or international content. Events citywide can be found by visiting www.nyc.gov and searching “Immigrant Affairs.”

American Dreamer Awards

The American Dreamer Awards were created to celebrate the significant accomplishments and contributions made by an individual or organization to better the lives of immigrants and immigrant communities in New York City. The Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs received over 100 nominations from community organizations, and individuals from across the five boroughs in March and five winners were selected from an outstanding group of candidates. This year, a new category was established, the Rising Star Award, to highlight students that show promise as American Dreamers for their work to advance the lives of their fellow students. The honorees are:

Ambassador Award- Seema Agnani, Executive Director of Chayya Community Development Corporation, is being honored for her role in combating the foreclosures that are threatening the South East Asian community of Queens. She founded Chayya in 2000 with the mission of creating a grassroots group that would address housing and community development issues in one of the most diverse communities in the city, Jackson Heights, Queens. She currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Association for Neighborhood Housing Development and the New York Immigration Coalition.

Business Leader Award- Jessamyn Rodriguez, Founder and CEO of Hot Bread Kitchen, is being honored for empowering immigrant women to build their economic security by opening pathways to professional opportunities in the food industry. Frustrated by the fact that despite the rich culinary history of immigrant women, they were still predominately cooking in people’s homes

instead of fine dining establishments, she founded Hot Bread Kitchen out of her own home in 2007. She designed a program that trained and paid women in the technical skills and English fluency necessary to succeed in the food industry. Since then she has grown Hot Bread Kitchen into a nationally respected bakery and training program that has trained 41 women from 15 different countries, supported over 20 immigrant entrepreneurs in growing their own food businesses, and has hired over 60 full-time and temporary positions to their bakery in the historic La Marqueta in Spanish Harlem.

Community Builder Award- Ligia Gualpa, Executive Director of Workers Justice Project, is being honored for her role in improving worker rights for the over 3000 mainly undocumented Day Laborers in New York City who are highly vulnerable to wage and job safety abuses. She was instrumental in building hiring halls from shipping containers in Brooklyn so that Day Laborers would have a place to negotiate a fair wage with contractors. A few months after their hiring hall in Bensonhurst was destroyed during Hurricane Sandy, she was able to foster community support and rebuild as she noticed the increasing demand for Day Laborers in post-disaster cleanup.

New York's Uniform Award- Sergeant Dhendup Chadotsang, of the 75th Precinct in Brooklyn, is being honored for his exemplary service with the Tibetan community. Tibetans in New York City tend to not speak English, lack a basic understanding of the law and are often victims of predatory practices. Dhendup volunteers with his community by guiding them through the often complicated process of living and working in New York City. He assists them with finding housing, filling out job applications, paying their electric bills and overall making the NYPD approachable to his community.

Visionary Award- Yolanny Rodriguez, Director of Teatro Las Tablas, is being honored for her work in raising awareness for women and children's rights through her production of "The Vagina Monologues," of which all of the proceeds go to various women's organizations. She founded the non-profit cultural organization Teatro Las Tablas which promotes and produces Latino theater in Spanish for Upper Manhattan. Additionally, she is a tenant organizer, activist and proud drama teacher to students with Down syndrome.

Rising Star- Angelo Cabrera, Founder and President of MASA, is being recognized for his work in helping immigrant children achieve academic success and ultimately graduate high school. He founded MASA in 2001 as part of a campaign focused on attaining the rights for undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition at CUNY and SUNY schools. As part of this campaign, Angelo and several others held a hunger strike to urge CUNY's policy of in-state tuition for undocumented students to become law. After the law passed in 2002, MASA began to focus its efforts on promoting access to higher education for students of Mexican descent living in New York. Having immigrated to the United States at the age of 15, he understands first-hand the many complex barriers Mexican youth face today. In order to serve his community better, he is pursuing a Masters in Public Administration at Baruch's School of Public Affairs.

Rising Star - Marybeth Melendez, Student Development Assistant for the College of Staten Island, is being recognized for her work with the immigrant community of Staten Island. She is a single mother of three who lost her eyesight to a degenerative eye disease that compelled her to retire from a promising career in a law firm. She and her seeing-eye dog Trixie have served as

volunteers for three years with El Centro del Inmigrante in Staten Island by working in their soup kitchen and distributing food and supplies to home-bound immigrants in Staten Island. In the wake of Hurricane Sandy, she and several classmates volunteered in Staten Island delivering food, water and clothing. Their actions prompted the Coast Guard and the FDNY to designate New Dorp as a central receiving and distribution site.

Rising Star - Denise Vivar, student at Sunset Park High School, is being recognized for her work in mobilizing her school behind the passage of the DREAM Act. After attending a presentation about the DREAM Act with two other students, she led a petition in her school and the community around Sunset Park, placed advertisements in favor of the DREAM Act in businesses and filmed a PSA about the issues affecting the passage of the bill.

Sharing Ellis Island Immigration Stories

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and the National Park Service Rangers from Ellis and Liberty Island will hold over twenty educational programs at schools, community and cultural institutions across the five boroughs during Immigrant Heritage Week. The Ellis Island Immigration Museum sustained severe damage from Hurricane Sandy and is not expected to re-open to the public this year. Through this partnership, Rangers will bring the stories of the millions of immigrants who passed through Ellis Island and whose descendants account for almost half of the American people into communities.

The programs being offered by the staff of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum are:

- **“We Are Ellis Island”** The Neighborhood Ranger will show the award-winning documentary *“Island of Hope; Island of Tears”*. The documentary chronicles the moving stories of people and families with dreams of opportunity leaving their homeland with what they could carry. The film also contains magnificent archival footage from Ellis Island when it was the primary port of entry for millions of European immigrants. The film is preceded by a 15 minute conversation led by a Park Ranger. Internet access or a DVD player and television monitor are required for this program.
- **“Immigrants: Let Us Entertain You”** Between 1892 and 1954, immigration officials processed over 12 million immigrants at Ellis Island. Immigrants helped build the United States of America and their efforts continue to define and enrich our nation's and our city's identity. Some of those passing through Ellis Island reaped a variety of riches in their adopted home. Some were honored for their contributions to variety of fields. As we celebrate this year's Immigrant Heritage Week, we salute immigrants who entered through the doors of Ellis Island and went on to leave an indelible mark on the arts. Attendees will be able to see the ship manifest records of Bob Hope, Cary Grant, Irving Berlin and Maria Von Trapp. They will also hear about three Ellis Island immigrants who were eventually elected Mayor of New York City. In addition, participants will discuss immigrants who made significant contributions to the fields of architecture and dance, and children will enjoy hearing the story of Chef Boyardee (yes, he too arrived at Ellis Island!). Participants over the age of 12 will experience the story of Ellis Island and be provided with tips to preserve their own family stories for generations to come.

- **“Punching the Ticket”** As immigrants finished processing at Ellis Island, many confronted the difficulties of communicating with others in a different language. Symphonies of Italian, Russian, and a host of other languages filled the air as they made their ways to their new homes. In *Punching the Ticket*, the Neighborhood Ranger will explore some of the communicative challenges and other difficulties immigrants faced as they settled in their new country. The program is highly interactive and designed for recent immigrants to the United States.
- **“It’s Story Time”** History, liberty, democracy, immigration and citizenship are represented in American symbols explored in these colorful, small-volume story books for children in the 3rd, 4th and 5th grades. The Neighborhood Ranger will read aloud from children’s books in which children will learn about liberty, pride, freedom and themselves. The following are suggested story books: *What is the Statue of Liberty?* by Janice Behrens; *Lily and Miss Liberty* by Carla Stevens; *Dreaming of America* by Eve Bunting, and *The Memory Coat* by Elvira Woodruff.

Celebrating the Stories of Our Community Campaign with WNET/Thirteen

The Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs has worked with WNET/Thirteen to create the Celebrating the Stories of our Community campaign. Currently broadcasting on WNET/Thirteen and their [website](#), Community Stories highlights the rich cultural heritage of diverse New Yorkers. Some of the community stories include Staten Island Borough Present Molinaro, New York State Assemblyman and former Commissioner of the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs Guillermo Linares, Suri Kasirer, and a Windows on the World restaurant worker and 9/11 survivor. Viewers are invited to share their family immigration stories by recording and uploading videos of their own that may be featured online or on television. WNET will also feature some of their immigrant-focused programming on air during Immigrant Heritage Week.

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