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## New fund aims to send Latinos to college

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Diane Evia-Lanevi

DURHAM, N.C. - Diane Evia-Lanevi's parents fled political persecution in Cuba when she was 13 months old, landed in Miami and started working to rebuild their lives and provide a future for their daughter.

Evia-Lanevi went on to graduate from college, become a journalist and raise a family of her own.

While enduring racism as a child and navigating a nearly all-white college in north Florida was difficult, Evia-Lanevi believes the struggles for immigrants today are greater.

"We had automatic green-card status, so we were privileged in that there was an immediate ability to work," she says of political refugees from Cuba. "It's a different wave of immigrants now and they're facing quite a lot of discrimination."

Today, Evia-Lanevi's goal is to provide a broader range of opportunity to young Latinos in North Carolina by making college possible.

On Aug. 16, she and her husband, an immigrant from Sweden, launched the Tomorrow Fund for Hispanic Students with a \$5,500 donation.

They're planning another gift for later in the year, have donations and pledges from a few other people, and aim to raise \$100,000 during the first year of the fund's life.

"I want to guarantee that more Hispanic students in North Carolina obtain their college degrees and help influence diversity on our campuses," Evia-Lanevi says. "It will help our state in the end to have an educated populace."

If all goes well, the first award will be made this coming spring in honor of Andrea Bazan, a long-time advocate for Hispanics and the president of the Triangle Community Foundation, which houses the Tomorrow Fund.

Bazan says having the first grant made in her name will be an honor, and she is proud that the community foundation is administering the fund.

"It's a very important step we're taking to have a fund that is going to be able to give funds for a school to make college a reality for students," she says. "These are first-generation college applicants and they are not coming from families that have means at all."

Rather than providing scholarship money directly to students, the fund will make grants to North Carolina colleges, which will use the funds to pave the way for students.

That could be through tuition support, or by providing funds for a host of other college-related costs, like clothing, luggage or travel expenses.

"We hope that these grants will serve as a bridge for these colleges and these students," says Evia-Lenevi.

By providing flexible funding that can be used as colleges see fit, she hopes to help stem not only the increasing high-school drop-out rate among Latino youth, but the large numbers who don't complete college once they start.

While the Tomorrow Fund and its advisory board will not be involved in choosing the individual students the money benefits, it requires that students be residents of North Carolina for at least two years, have graduated from a high school in the state and have financial need.

The fund's intent is that awards be open to students regardless of their documentation status.

And the advisory board of the fund hopes to stay involved with the students throughout their four years of college, says Evia-Lanevi.

"The board has committed to working with the colleges to make sure there's some sort of support system for these students," she says. "Specifically mentors, and preferably someone who is first-generation college."

Currently, the fund's advisory board stands at 12 people, and includes well-known leaders like Brad Wilson, CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina, and Tony Asion, executive director of El Pueblo.

The early enthusiasm for the effort is encouraging, says Bazan.

"I'm very pleased to see the number of people who have been willing to take part in the fund through contributing and being on the advisory board," she says. "This is giving people a chance to take some action while we're waiting for policy changes at the state and local level."

Right now, the fund plans to award grants only to private colleges in the state, but will revisit that decision at the first full meeting of the advisory board later this month.

To increase support for the fund among Hispanics, Evia-Lanevi also is launching the Latino Business Giving Circle, whose members each will donate \$1,000 a year to the fund.

She is aiming for 10 members, a goal she says is conservative.

"Latino philanthropy is in its beginning stages," she says. "There is now starting to be enough giving power among Latinos that I'd like to see Latinos helping Latinos. There are those of us out there that can afford to give."

For Evia-Lanevi, the Tomorrow Fund is a way not only to boost Latino youth and strengthen the state, it is a way to give back to the country that took her in.

"I was a political refugee, he is an economic refugee, and our daughter is from China," she says of her family. "As immigrants who have been fortunate, we should do whatever we can do."