

Chelsea receives high honors at Bank of America NEI Awards

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By Record Staff

Bank of America held its 2009 Boston Neighborhood Excellence Initiative Awards last Thursday morning in the McKim Building at the Boston Public Library. The annual celebration awards major grants to outstanding charitable organizations and paid internships to young individuals that have worked to make the Greater Boston Area a better place. Chelsea had a major presence at the ceremony with awards going to one local organization and one recent Chelsea High grad.

Jemima Barrios, who graduated from Chelsea High last year and is currently attending Pitzer College in Los Angeles, CA., was one of five local youths recognized by the Initiative as Student Leaders. Barrios participated in a paid summer internship at the United Way of Massachusetts Bay & Merrimack Valley and attended a week-long Student Leadership Summit with the other four honorees in Washington, D.C. to develop their understanding of how government, nonprofit organizations and the private sector partner to create positive change.

While at Chelsea High, Barrios was an active member of the Interact Club, with whom she took part in a project wherein she and her peers gathered supplies, games, notes and other items and delivered them to members of the U.S. Marine Corps that were serving in Iraq. Barrios also spent a day serving as the head of the Planning & Development Board at City Hall as part of last year's Student Government Day.

Because she is on the other side of the country studying Pitzer College, Barrios was unable to attend Thursday's ceremony. Her parents, Nefectaly and Ana Barrios, were in attendance on her behalf and accepted a trophy commemorative her achievement.

Bank of America also named Chelsea's Roca Inc. as one of the two recipients of its Neighborhood Builders Award (the other was the Boston-based Project Place). Roca and Project Place will both receive \$200,000 in unrestricted funding, as well as specially designed leadership development programs for its staff.

"On behalf of all of us at Roca, we are incredibly honored to receive the Neighborhood Builders Award from the Bank of America and to do so in the company of Project Place,"

said Molly Baldwin, Executive Director of Roca. “Roca’s mission is to help disengaged and disenfranchised young people move out of violence and poverty.”

Roca is a performance-based and outcomes-driven organization that helps young people to change their behavior and lives through a High-Risk Youth Intervention Model. Roca serves high-risk young people ages 14-24 years old in Chelsea, Revere and East Boston. According to the organization, Roca has helped more than 15,000 young people change their lives in its 21-year history.

“The Neighborhood Builder Award recognizes those organizations that, like Roca, have made major strides in addressing their communities’ most pressing social issues,” said Bob Gallery, Massachusetts president, Bank of America. “By connecting with Chelsea’s most at-risk teens, Roca creates opportunities for local youth who have nowhere else to turn, empowering them to change their lives for the better.”

“Those of us that have been toiling in the human service world for a long time are familiar with the concept of a safety net – Roca is a safety trampoline,” added Chelsea City Manager Jay Ash. “When a kid falls through everything else, all the other nets, Roca is not only there to make sure the kid does not crash, but helps bounce the kid back up again so that the young person can achieve greatness.”

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