

IMMIGRATION OFFICIAL, BACK AT USF, HAILS HISPANIC ACHIEVERS

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Body

The head of the nation's citizenship and immigration services came home to his alma mater Wednesday to praise a theater full of Hispanic students for something he never won: a scholarship.

Emilio Gonzalez - a Cuban-American with a bachelor's degree from the University of South Florida, master's degrees from Tulane University and the U.S. Naval War College and a doctorate in international relations from the University of Miami, plus a long military and diplomatic career - told 114 students theirs was the impressive achievement.

The students received more than \$205,000 during the 16th annual USF Latino Scholarship Awards Ceremony.

With a high number of Hispanics dropping out of school, Gonzalez stressed the importance of their achievement and opportunity.

"You've been given a gift in life," said Gonzalez, whose family left Cuba in 1961 when he was 4. They settled in Tampa, where he attended Tampa Catholic High School. "Don't take life for granted."

The scholarship winners include college seniors and high school valedictorians, said Patsy Feliciano, the director of the program. And among them are some whose circumstances make them particularly remarkable.

Some entered the country as high school students, became fluent in English and joined the honor roll in a few short years, she said.

Others are children of migrant workers, the first in the families to attend college.

Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio told the crowd at the USF theater the students reminded her of her own father, who died about six months ago.

An immigrant from Italy who arrived at age 2, her father did poorly in grade school. But he grew up to become an English professor at USF, she said.

"No one thought he'd amount to much," Iorio said. "But he ended up being a great man. You all have greatness in you, too."

The Miami Herald contributed to this report.

Graphic

PHOTO: Emilio Gonzalez

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