

IMMIGRANTS LEARNING WITH GRACE AND STYLE

Daily News (New York)

June 04, 1997, Wednesday

Copyright 1997 Daily News, L.P.

Section: Suburban; Pg. 3

Length: 669 words

Byline: By JOYCE SHELBY

Body

When Vania Mena, the daughter of immigrants from El Salvador, graduates from a nine-month training program tomorrow, she is heading straight to corporate America.

"It's hard to get into corporations. You have to know somebody," said Mena, 20, a former cashier.

Mena knows somebody the staff of the Grace Institute on the upper East Side. For 100 years, the not-for-profit institute has been training young immigrant women to become secretaries, also placing them in some of the city's most prestigious firms.

Next month, Mena will go to work for the Wall Street investment firm Lehman Brothers, where her starting salary will be in the mid-\$ 20,000 range. With her earnings, she plans to help her family and go to school part time, studying forensic science.

A century ago, when the shipbuilder and industrialist William Russell Grace himself an Irish Catholic immigrant used to tour the docks and talk to the steam fitters who worked for him, he heard a frequent complaint: The wives of the steam fitters didn't know how to cook the foods of their new homeland, America. Nor did they know how to use household accessories, like irons.

Grace decided to establish an institute to offer cooking, sewing and child-care courses. The school later expanded to offer young immigrant women in general, and their daughters, a chance to learn bookkeeping, typing and stenography so that they could find work outside the home.

Grace asked the Sisters of Charity to run the school, and 100 years later, the nonsectarian institute is still serving similar generations of newcomers.

The students might not have varied much in 100 years, but the courses have felt the changing times. Typing has been replaced by keyboard entry and computers. Cooking has been expanded to include catering and cake decorating as alternatives for women who want to work at home.

Even the name of the sewing course has been changed. Now it's clothing construction. And a class to earn a GED has been added.

Only stenography has survived, since many of the law firms still require it, said Sister Audrey Boylan, the school's director of student activities.

Grace Institute is "a gold mine. It is an excellent, excellent school," said Jackie Ampuero-Laskowski, a human resources analyst for the law firm of Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson.

"We are proud to say we hired them," she said.

IMMIGRANTS LEARNING WITH GRACE AND STYLE

The firm started offering jobs to institute graduates in the late '80s. This year the firm recruited 12 students from 125 graduates of the nine-month course.

Registration at Grace is \$ 500 per semester, which includes books and fees. In the intense program, women study various word-processing programs, as well as get an introduction to the Internet and Gregg shorthand.

There's also dictaphone transcription and business communications.

The Grace family remains actively involved with the school. Margaret Grace, the wife of the late Peter Grace and herself a 1938 graduate of the institute, is currently the president.

Marlene Fredericks, 20, of Cape Town, says she appreciates the training the institute gave her.

"I learned a lot more here than somewhere else," she said. Fredericks will soon start her new job with Orrick Sutcliffe, a law firm.

Other young women were equally enthusiastic.

Abigail Moynihan, 22, of the Bronx, said she doesn't regret leaving college to attend Grace.

"The training is a stepping stone, a chance for advancement in companies," said the daughter of Irish immigrants who recently took a job with Met Life.

Ayo Tapson, 21, of Greenville, Liberia, ultimately wants to be a nurse but will use the skills she learned at Grace to support herself while she pursues her other dreams, she said.

She's already on the way to her dream. In September, Tapson is going to Marymount Manhattan College.

The Grace Institute will end its centennial celebration Nov. 15 with a Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral, followed by a luncheon at the Waldorf-Astoria.

Graphic

BUDD WILLIAMS DAILY NEWS THE FUTURE looks bright for (from l.) Ayo Tapson, Vania Mena and Marlene Fredericks, who attend the Grace Institute.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE (89%); HUMAN RESOURCES (78%); WAGES & SALARIES (77%); HOME BASED EMPLOYMENT (77%); WOMEN (76%); COMPANY EARNINGS (76%); MAJOR US LAW FIRMS (75%); LEGAL SERVICES (75%); NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS (71%); SEWING & NEEDLECRAFTS (70%); LAW FIRM ATTORNEY RECRUITMENT (65%); FORENSICS (54%); CHILD CARE (51%)

Company: FRIED FRANK HARRIS SHRIVER & JACOBSON LLP (84%); LEHMAN BROTHERS HOLDINGS INC (57%); FRIED FRANK HARRIS SHRIVER & JACOBSON LLP (84%); LEHMAN BROTHERS HOLDINGS INC (57%)

IMMIGRANTS LEARNING WITH GRACE AND STYLE

Ticker: LEH (NYSE) (57%)

Industry: MAJOR US LAW FIRMS (75%); LEGAL SERVICES (75%); CATERING SERVICES (71%); WORD PROCESSING SOFTWARE (69%); SHIPBUILDING (68%); LAW FIRM ATTORNEY RECRUITMENT (65%); BUSINESS TELEPHONE SERVICE (50%)

Load-Date: June 4, 1997

End of Document