The Colorado Health Foundation™

Saguache Activist Liza Marron Receives Award for Her Work to Enrich Healthy Bodies, Minds and Communities

DENVER, CO – Last week, the Colorado Health Foundation presented Liza Marron with the 2018 Dr. Virgilio Licona Community Health Leadership Award at the Colorado Health Symposium. Inspired by Dr. Licona's pioneering spirit, this award program seeks to honor his life legacy as an advocate for social justice, civil rights and community health. It recognizes impassioned Coloradans who are finding innovative and effective strategies to overcoming community health barriers across the state.

Liza is the founding director of the San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition (SLVLFC) in rural southern Colorado, a nonprofit organization that seeks to foster an equitable local food system that restores the health of the people, community, economy and ecosystem. With Liza at the helm, the SLVLFC negotiated with a local school district to preserve 38 acres near Alamosa, Colorado. Securing this land thus allowed newly unemployed migrant workers the opportunity to grow fresh food while temporarily out of work. Six years later, the families continue to partner at the park; some grow food in family garden plots and others are part of a farmer incubator, all known as the Rio Grande Farm Park.

The newly established park provides aspiring farmers with access to the land and farming opportunities to support career mobility. Among many food security and education programs underway, the SLVLFC has graduated more than 300

participants annually from its evidence-based Cooking Matters program teaching families to cook healthy on a budget since its inception in 2013.



From 1989 until 1997, Liza worked as an income maintenance technician for the Saguache County Department of Social Services. In this role, she improved conditions for clients, specifically migrant workers who were subjected to standing in long lines while waiting for food stamp interviews. She worked to change the policy so that doors would open at 8 a.m., allowing workers to get to their job in the fields on time, ultimately helping them to thrive and live healthy, productive lives.

Following her time at the Department, Liza oversaw a promising youth mentoring program, Pilots for Prevention, based at Center-consolidated Schools. Until 2005,

she worked to establish and run a weekly tutoring program, Homework Club, in all three Saguache County school districts. Using the Youth Assets Model, she matched volunteer mentors with asset-challenged youth.

During her time leading the mentoring program, Liza was deeply affected by the story of a program participant who was floundering through the foster care system and decided to become a licensed foster home, specializing in hard-to-place youth. Since, she opened her home to several teens – all of which stayed with Liza until they were emancipated from the system and two of which who were the first to graduate high school in their families.

Beginning in 2007, Liza served as the coordinator of the first cohort of LiveWell Colorado (LWC) communities in Alamosa at Valley-Wide Health Systems. She recognized that health equity was not a LWC priority and lobbied, alongside three others, to create the LWC Community Advisory Committee. Liza served on this committee for several years advocating for health equity. In 2016, she was part of the LWC team that brought Double Up Food Bucks for SNAP users to Colorado and just this year, she became the first community representative on the LWC Board of Directors. From 2007 to 2013, LiveWell Alamosa brought together community health advocates monthly to learn, discuss and act to make the San Luis Valley a healthier place to live.

“A true champion for social justice, Liza has relentlessly shined a light on community health issues by raising the voices of those left in the shadows,” said Foundation President and CEO Karen McNeil-Miller. “Her lifelong path of activism is a testament to Dr. Licona’s unwavering commitment to those most in need. We are honored to present the 2018 Dr. Virgilio Licona Health Leadership Award to Liza for her determination and dedication to the health those she serves.”

Liza and her family joined the Foundation’s Board, staff and fellow Symposium attendees for the award ceremony on Wednesday, Aug. 1. Along with the award, the Foundation has pledged to make a $20,000 donation to a Colorado-based nonprofit of her choice.

“I am humbled and pleased to be recognized in the same realm as that of Dr. Licona’s critical life work to create health equity," said Liza. “I share a common desire as the late Dr. Licona to fight for social justice and equity. Being honored with this award gives me new vigor to support community health that enriches the well-being of all Coloradans.”

The award program is named after Dr. Virgilio Licona, who passed in 2016. Dr. Licona worked to improve the health of Coloradans most in need, focusing his expertise as a physician in rural health care delivery and migrant health. A nationally recognized advocate for social justice, his role as a leader in communities brought a critical voice to some of the most important conversations and decisions related to how we can bring health in reach for all Coloradans.

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