

Award: Lilia E. Peters Service to New Immigrants and the International Community Award
Recipient: Mauricio Salinas
Presenter: Claudia Lennhoff

Thank you, Ron.

It is now my privilege to present this award to one of our own Board Members, Mauricio Salinas.

Mauricio has been serving on our Board of Directors since 2014, but his service to Health Care Consumers, and to new immigrants and the international community began long before that.

In fact, in 2009, we recognized Mauricio with the Henrietta DeBoer Volunteer award for Mauricio's work as a Volunteer Hotline Advocate. At that time, Mauricio was primarily working with our Spanish speaking clients, and that is when I first learned about Mauricio's total commitment to doing whatever he could to help new immigrants. As a volunteer for us, he went above and beyond helping our clients with health care issues. Sometimes people needed transportation or they needed help communicating with a utility service – whatever it was, Mauricio was there to help the new immigrant families and individuals get adjusted and get their needs met in our community.

Mauricio has a business, finance, and accounting background. He is an entrepreneur and as someone very connected to the Latino community, he noticed that one of the things that this community was lacking was a Mexican ice cream shop. So, Mauricio went to a town in Mexico where he trained with a master and he learned how to make all amazing flavors of water-based Mexican ice cream, and he opened up the El Oasis ice cream shop in the Five Points shopping center in Urbana behind Walgreens.

The name El Oasis is fitting – not just because of the delicious ice cream there (y'all should try it!), but also because Mauricio himself has created a space where people can find more than an amazing desert – in Mauricio, they can find help, hope, and community.

Mauricio is a fascinating person.

He is always busy, but he always makes time to help individuals and our community.

As an immigrant himself, Mauricio has a deep understanding of the challenges that face immigrants – whether documented or undocumented – and his dedication to helping individuals and families, not only adjust, but thrive in our community, is profound and it is born of deep compassion.

For decades, Mauricio has been an important resource for so many people who have immigrated to our community. He has helped people connect to us so that they can get the health care they need. He has helped advise people on financial and business matters. He has helped others start their own businesses. He has helped individuals who were having legal problems or landlord problems, so that they would know their rights and know where to go for help. He helps interpret for people and he refers people to where they need to go to get help.

He just helps people with pretty much every single need they have, as they are trying to find their way in our community. If someone doesn't know where to turn for help, they always know they can turn to Mauricio.

A recent report from the New American Economy featured Mauricio in an article titled “Immigrant Entrepreneur From Mexico Pays It Forward in Urbana, IL”.

Mauricio has more than paid it forward by helping individuals and families.

He also serves on Boards of organizations that are working to improve the lives of new immigrants and international community members here in Champaign County.

Mauricio is a Board Member of the Champaign-Urbana Immigration Forum, and the Campus YMCA’s New American Welcome Center.

Mauricio directly helps people with practical matters, so that they can live and be well in our community. But he also helps fight against injustice against immigrants – which, let’s be honest, is at an all-time high right now under the xenophobic and mean Trump administration.

Like Lilia Peters, whom this award memorializes, Mauricio Salinas is a community member who has dedicated himself with extraordinary energy and compassion to improving the lives of immigrants here in our community. And by doing so, has also helped make us a better, stronger, and more diverse community.

I am sorry to say, though, that Mauricio is leaving us to go back to Mexico, to start the newest chapter of his fascinating life. But all of us, and all the people who Mauricio has helped and supported during the decades spent here in our community, are better off because Mauricio was here.

Mauricio, on behalf of the Board and Staff of the Champaign County Health Care Consumers, we are so grateful to you, and we will really miss you. It is our privilege and honor to present you with the Lilia E. Peters Service to New Immigrants and the International Community Award.