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## Press Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **GALA AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM HONORED BY FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA AT THE WHITE HOUSE**

*Paso Nuevo Program is recognized for positive youth outcomes*

Washington, D.C. – Christian Sanchez, age 16, of Washington, DC was at the White House today to receive an award from First Lady Michelle Obama on behalf of Paso Nuevo, a youth program of GALA Hispanic Theatre, which was recognized for its effectiveness in developing learning and life skills in young people by engaging them in the arts.

Sanchez began participating in the Paso Nuevo program when he was eight years old and was feeling pressure from peers, family and school. His involvement with Paso Nuevo has given him a safe environment that provided focus and direction to his life, improved his educational achievement, and sparked an interest in the arts. And today, Sanchez stood in the East Room of the White House to accept the 2012 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award from Mrs. Obama.

Chosen from a pool of more than 350 nominations and 50 finalists, Paso Nuevo was one of 12 after-school and out-of-school programs across the country to receive the award, which is the highest honor such programs can receive in the United States. The awards are administered by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH), in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The award honors community-based arts and humanities programs that make a marked difference in the lives of their participants by improving academic scores and graduation rates, enhancing life skills, developing positive relationships with peers and adults, and expressing themselves creatively. Louis Vuitton is the corporate sponsor of the 2012 award program, and Fox Audience Strategy is the national media sponsor.

“In spite of all the challenges and obstacles our young people face, in spite of all their fears and doubts, you teach them to make art anyway,” said Mrs. Obama addressing the awardees. “You teach them that no matter what life throws their way, if they draw on their own talent,

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creativity and courage...if they're persistent and tenacious and bold...then they can truly make something extraordinary out of their lives.”

“Having the chance to represent my peers in accepting this award from the First Lady of the United States in the White House was an experience that I'll never forget,” said Sanchez. “It showed me that the power of programs like Paso Nuevo to change kids' lives is recognized and valued.”

Paso Nuevo was created to provide low-income and at-risk Latino youth with critical life and job skills in a creative, bilingual environment. Through Paso Nuevo, Latino youth ages 12-19 have a safe space in which to explore and take pride in their linguistic and cultural heritage, improve literacy and communication skills in both English and Spanish, discover their creative voice, gain valuable academic and job skills, and develop the tools necessary to engage more successfully in their schools and communities. Since its founding in 1993, the program has engaged approximately 1000 young people in creative writing, performance, music and technical theater workshops. The powerful impact of the program is illustrated by the fact that youth who complete the Paso Nuevo program graduate from high school at a 20% higher rate than their peers outside the program.

The award was celebrated by a number of its long-time partners and supporters, including the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, the Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs of the District of Columbia, Children & Youth Investment Trust Corporation, and the Inter-American Development Bank-DC Solidarity Program.

“By engaging and inspiring young people, Paso Nuevo is giving them not just the vision but the skills to build a new and better life for themselves and their families, and for our community,” said Guillermo García, with UBS Financial Services, Inc. and president of the GALA Board of Directors. “These young people are learning how to use creative thinking to work as a team, to solve problems and to express themselves constructively. These are exactly the kinds of skills we want them to have to be able to succeed in school, in work and in life.”

In addition to the national recognition bestowed by receipt of the prestigious award, Paso Nuevo will also receive \$10,000 to support its programming and engage more young people from the community.

“We hope this award will draw attention to the documented fact that programs like ours are essential investments not just in the lives of our young people, but in our community, as well,” said Rebecca Read Medrano, Executive Director and Co-founder of GALA Hispanic Theatre. “We're incredibly proud of this achievement and of the young people, volunteers, supporters, board and staff who made it possible.”

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“GALA,” added Quique Aviles, director of the Paso Nuevo program, “has been making art with neighborhood youth for more than 20 years. It feels great to get this recognition. It means that we’ve been doing something right. And we have so many young people, now young adults in their 20s and 30s, who continue to create and stay connected to the arts and their community.”

The National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award is the nation’s highest honor for after-school arts and humanities programs. The awards recognize and support outstanding programs that lay new pathways to creativity, expression, and achievement outside of the regular school day. These programs excite and engage a range of students, cultivating imagination, collaboration, discipline and academic success, with demonstrable results. They also provide safe harbors after school, on weekends and evenings for children and youth in some of our country’s most at-risk urban and rural settings. For more information, visit [www.pcah.gov](http://www.pcah.gov).

For more information about Paso Nuevo and GALA Hispanic Theatre, please visit [www.galatheatre.org](http://www.galatheatre.org).

Target is the proud sponsor of **GALA**’s 2012-2013 Season. 