

# MÁS FUERTES JUNTOS

CELEBRATING HISPANIC AND  
LATINO PHILANTHROPY



“Philanthropy in Hispanic communities has always been quiet but powerful – built on values like reciprocity, resilience and kinship. Today, we have the chance to honor generations of generosity with intention and uplift what our communities have always known: that coming together is how we create lasting change.”

### **JOANNA RIVAS**

Philanthropic Adviser, Greater Milwaukee Foundation



“Philanthropy goes beyond just sharing money. To truly achieve success, we have to find a harmonious relationship between financial, social and human capital in our communities.”

### **DR. NELSON SOLER**

President and CEO, Multicultural Entrepreneurial Institute



# UN MILWAUKEE PARA TODOS EXIGE PERSPECTIVAS Y ALIANZAS LATINAS

In collaboration with donors and community leaders across the region, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation is ushering in a fresh perspective on philanthropy – one in which all voices are valued and differences drive progress.

Throughout greater Milwaukee's Latino community, philanthropy is entwined with daily life.

Economic vitality sustains families, cultural celebrations unite communities, and a sense of collective responsibility upholds opportunity and well-being for all. A vibrant mosaic of traditions and ambitions, carried across generations, demonstrates the power of resiliency and the lasting impact of pursuing a dream.

Latino leaders across the region remind us that success is most powerful when shared. Whether starting a business or supporting one, serving on a board or mentoring a future changemaker, gifts of time, talent, treasure and ties help ensure that no one is left behind. *El bienestar de uno es el bienestar de todos.*

We celebrate the Latino philanthropists, community builders and allies who lead with *corazón* – building bridges across cultures, finding solidarity in dark moments and fostering growth that benefits us all.

*Somos más fuertes juntos.* Join us as we build a Milwaukee for all.



## FEATURE

# THE POWER OF POSSIBILITY

## FRANCESCA MAYCA WEGNER PROMUEVE OPORTUNIDADES Y CONEXIONES PARA LOS PROFESIONALES LATINOS

Before Francesca Mayca Wegner was born, her mother immigrated to Chicago from Peru. Despite her family's limited means, Mayca Wegner saw the impact of sharing a fundamental resource: opportunity.

"People often talk about immigrants coming to this country with nothing, but I always reframe that," Mayca Wegner said. "My mom might not have had much in terms of financial resources or education, but she came with big dreams and a vision for her and her kids' lives."

Mayca Wegner aims to open doors for others, especially those who have experienced trauma or marginalization. It's a mission that guided her through business degrees from Marquette University and fundraising positions in higher education and nonprofits, as well as to her current role, leading **Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee (HPGM)**.

"My mom would always say to me, 'I came here so you could have choices,'" she said. "That sort of self-determination and agency is something I hope to move forward for everybody I serve."

It's an approach reflected in her title, President & Chief Possibilities Officer, at an organization that drives economic and social advancement

for current and aspiring Latino leaders. Since she joined in 2021, Mayca Wegner has led HPGM's evolution to meet people where they are and inspire confidence and growth.

The effort has included making space for professionals across industries, inviting educators, nonprofit employees, small business owners and others to become members. It also has meant welcoming speakers from across the country to expand access to new ideas and serve as a catalyst for creativity and innovation. The payoff has been significant: HPGM membership grew to over 5,000 in 2025, over double the total just two years earlier.

To Mayca Wegner, it's not just the organization's reach but the impact on hearts and minds that is most meaningful, especially within the Latino community.

"We've been very clear that at HPGM, we do not believe that your *latinidad*, your Latino identity, is something to overcome," she said. "We have to adjust mindsets to see cultural values and individual strengths as assets, whether in the workplace or the community. We're not empowering people – we are just the mirror for our members to see their own power and possibilities."

Shifting the narrative about the Latino community has become a critical aspect of HPGM's work. Despite Latinos contributing over \$4 trillion to the United States economy and now representing one in five people nationwide, the community's impact remains under the radar, including for many within it.

"We might not call it philanthropy, but there is so much wealth that exists and is shared in our community," Mayca Wegner said. "Giving back is a value within many Latino cultures, and there's a reciprocity to it. We pour into community and community pours back into us."

As Latino communities across the country contend with disruptions to safety and stability, HPGM's focus on aspiration, belonging and

connection is a welcome respite for many Hispanic Wisconsinites. Mayca Wegner hopes that other organizations and philanthropists across the region will continue to rise to the moment with courage and solidarity.

For HPGM's part, the message will remain steadfast: reaffirming the power of possibility and the strength already present in a diverse and increasingly connected Latino community.

"If Latinos ourselves feel that we are not an economic power, if we feel that we don't have a voice and aren't civically engaged, then how can we expect anybody else to know those things about us?" Mayca Wegner said. "Shifting the paradigm is really important."

"Latinos often carry a backpack of burdens: imposter syndrome, a lack of belonging, insecurity. It starts to get heavy over a lifetime, and you might not realize how much it holds you back from living up to your potential. **Our intention at HPGM is to help members put down the backpack.**"

## FRANCESCA MAYCA WEGNER

President & Chief Possibilities Officer,  
Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee



## LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

# REBUILDING BELONGING

### RUBEN GAONA'S DARKEST DAYS BROUGHT CLARITY ON FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS.

After serving eight years in federal prison for a drug-related crime, he founded **My Way Out**, a nonprofit that connects justice-impacted people with employment, housing, transportation and other reentry needs. To Gaona, philanthropy means paying forward the generosity that his community offered him and sharing testimony of a message that took years to internalize: everyone is more than their biggest mistake.

#### How did you decide that you wanted to give your time and talent to the community?

My true passion started five years into my incarceration. I took a deep look at myself and reflected on what got me there and what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. It was then that I wrote a quote: "'I can't' does not exist. It is an excuse we tell ourselves not to reach our true potential."

At that moment, I told myself I would never allow anyone to tell me that I couldn't do anything. Before the night was over, I came to a decision that I wanted to help others understand that mistakes do not define who we are. There is a bigger purpose for justice-impacted individuals to continue to rebuild and grow and not settle for the bare minimum, because the bare minimum is possibly what led us to be incarcerated.

#### How has the Hispanic and Latino community played a part in your journey?

I can honestly say that coming out of prison, my Hispanic community raised me. In 2018, I went back to school, to University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I learned about

#### Hispanic Professionals of Greater

**Milwaukee** and heard about their gala. I remember thinking, I've never been to a gala in my life, and I want to see what it's like to have a seat at the table. One of my friends and mentors told me to email **Alberto Maldonado** from UWM's **Roberto Hernández Center** to ask if I could volunteer. I was like, how could little old me just email an executive director?

But Alberto responded and said, "Ruben, I have one better for you: be my plus one." I then got introduced to **Francesca Mayca Wegner** from HPGM, **Dr. Victor Amaya** from Data You Can Use and so many others. Fast-forward to today, I'm now going to that gala as a board member of HPGM.

#### How do you define success?

The first thing I always say is, I'm blessed. To be able to look out the window and not see a wall or fencing – that is what success looks like to me. Success looks different on everyone. Success could be someone needing a bus pass to get from point A to point B, and that opens doors for that person.

To me, monetary wealth is not success. Success is being able to be your authentic self, being



blessed to be able to open your eyes and have another opportunity to see who you can help.

### **What does justice mean to you?**

Justice means looking at an individual for who that person truly is, not their background or skin color, just seeing that person and thinking of how we can move forward. To me, justice is deeper than fairness – it's about belonging. It's about creating spaces where those who have stumbled can still stand tall.

### **What would it look like if our communities embraced those definitions?**

First and foremost, our data would show it. Our recidivism numbers would be lower, and

the ripple effect in our communities would be impactful. When you provide the head of the household true opportunity in the sense of belonging, kids see transformation from their parents. You're no longer breaking up families; you're keeping them together. Employers get access to untapped talent. It's a win-win for the community.

We have over 24,000 people incarcerated in the state of Wisconsin. Data shows that about 95 to 98% of them will return to their communities. So why don't we provide opportunities for success? Why don't we make them feel welcome?

"When people of color have dreams, many of us tell ourselves that we'll start planning them, but we never execute, because we don't believe we can actually do it. **So now I tell people, don't ever think that you can't execute a dream.**"

**RUBEN GAONA**  
Executive Director, My Way Out



**HONORING**

*generosity in all its forms*

**WE ARE**

**TIEMPO  
WE SHARE OUR TIME**



Attorney **Tomás Clasen** was born in Guatemala and adopted as a baby by a Shorewood family. As a child, he learned about his birth mother, a teenager who signed his birth certificate with a thumbprint. Her story sparked Clasen's commitment to education, including through board leadership with the **Wisconsin Hispanic Lawyers Association**.

"A lot of first-generation Black and Brown law students don't have the institutional knowledge that folks who have lawyers in their family have access to," Clasen said. "Helping them break down misconceptions and barriers is really rewarding."

Clasen credits his adoptive parents for his philanthropic mindset and his wife, Katie Coffey, for a shared approach to community service.

"Katie and I bring different talents, experience and passions to the table, but we have a finite amount of time," he said. "So we look to allocate our time to maximize impact in areas we care about, while supporting each other in the process. We call it double dipping."

**TALENTO  
WE SHARE OUR TALENT**



Milwaukee muralist **Reynaldo Hernandez** always taught his children about history, especially connected to his Mexican and Black heritage. Over the years, he has taken on new roles in daughter **Rozalia Hernandez-Singh's** life: mentor, artistic collaborator and even friendly competitor. From playful caricatures to towering murals, they both enjoy telling stories through art.

"I learned from my dad how much is expressed in a face," Hernandez-Singh said. "When you put a face of someone of color on a mural, and they see it reflected back at them, it really means something."

Both see their work, including their murals in **ThriveOn King**, as acutely connected to community. Hernandez continues to share his knowledge with mentees and other community members, something he's been familiar with for decades.

"Back in the 1960s and '70s, we had little communities of artists that started co-ops and workshops to help our own Latin and Black and Native communities," Hernandez said. "I would call that philanthropy."



# PHILANTHROPISTS

## TESORO WE SHARE OUR TREASURE



As a young man, the late **José Olivieri** made up his mind to be a positive person. Decades of mentorship, leadership and community stewardship evidence his success, though he would never be the one to say it.

"Our family had no idea about many of José's awards and partnerships until years later. He was humble through it all," said his wife, Jeanne Olivieri.

A native of Puerto Rico, Olivieri was dedicated to service and the Latino community, including chairing the boards of directors of the **Greater Milwaukee Foundation** and **United Community Center**. The couple also created a Foundation fund to support area nonprofits, an example of his legacy living on in a community that loved him dearly.

"In terms of his philanthropy, it was about caring, it was about finding common ground, it was about giving what you have to give," Jeanne said. "I can't say enough about José. I miss him every day."

## CONEXIONES WE SHARE OUR TIES



**Pedro Colón** jokes that his career has earned him two non-accredited PhDs: one in Wisconsin and one in the Latino community. His experience includes serving as Wisconsin's first Latino legislator, 13 years as a circuit court judge, and, most recently, becoming the first Latino member of the **Wisconsin Court of Appeals**.

"I've found that the only way to help my community is to learn absolutely everything about it and stay connected," he said. "The more we move together, the more we all succeed."

To Colón, a former Foundation Board member, getting to know people is key to representation. His ultimate goal is a vibrant region that is literate, numerate and aspirational. That includes the Latino community, which he sees as abundant with success and potential.

"I know there are a lot of forces trying to minimize our contributions, minimize how we stay together as communities, but that's not going to happen," Colón said. "I'm still betting on us."

# JOIN US

## TIEMPO TIME

- **Engage in the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's stakeholder opportunities**, including events and convenings
- **Consider joining the Foundation's Community Adviser & Ambassador Network (CAAN)**, comprised of leaders and professional advisers with diverse backgrounds and a passion for philanthropy and service

## TALENTO TALENT

- **Volunteer with a nonprofit** by joining a board, serving on a committee, or sharing your expertise
- **Provide pro bono consulting services** to a nonprofit of interest

## TESORO TREASURE

- **Start or grow a fund** at the Foundation
- **Create a legacy gift** through the Foundation to ensure an impact
- **Coinvest in our strategic priorities** focused on health equity, educational opportunity, housing security and economic mobility

## CONEXIONES TIES

- **Introduce members of your network** to the Foundation
- **Refer a community leader or professional adviser** to join CAAN

The Greater Milwaukee Foundation is YOUR community foundation, and charitable partnership is YOUR chance to share your unique gifts in this collaborative work. **Together, we can build a Milwaukee for all.**



Artists Tia Richardson and Jeanette Martín worked with community members to create "Beauty Opens the Door to Join Us" on Milwaukee's south side, thanks in part to Greater Milwaukee Foundation support.



*Photo front: The Latino Arts Strings Program is a pre-college music training program established in 2002 by Latino Arts, a Greater Milwaukee Foundation grantee.*



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