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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAKING SPACE FOR YOUTH VOICES: Mission Hill Teen Receives Award for Role in Redevelopment Process

Rafael Feliciano, Senior Youth Community Organizer at Sociedad Latina, was awarded the Youth Leadership of the Year Award by Mission Hill Neighborhood Housing Services at their annual meeting on April 3rd. He is the first youth to ever receive this recognition.

Feliciano was recognized for his work on two redevelopment projects in Mission Hill: Parcel 25 and the Ditson-Pickle Factory. He created a digital story on the history of Parcel 25 and serves on the 3E's (Easements, Egress, and Existing Conditions) task force of Mission Hill Neighborhood Housing Services. He also serves on the Impact Advisory Group for the Ditson Pickle Factory development.

Feliciano, currently a high school senior, began working at Sociedad Latina in the fall of 2005. His digital story, "Parcel 25: Connecting a Community," can be viewed at <http://www.missionhillnhs.org/parcel25.htm>. The piece debuted at a Parcel 25 Community Workshop earlier this year.

As the youngest member of the 3Es task force, Feliciano admitted that at first the process was "very intimidating." He soon became more comfortable and participated more as he realized the unique perspective he brought to the discussion. "Youth are continually skipped over in these conversations and construction," said Feliciano. He believes there is an important role for youth in the development in and around Mission Hill because they "are the ones that will be living here 20 years from now."

Feliciano and Luis "Andy" Rivera, another Senior Youth Community Organizer at Sociedad Latina, were the first two Mission Hill youth to be appointed to an Impact

Advisory Group (IAG). They serve on the IAG for the development project at the Ditson Pickle Factory. Appointed by the Mayor, the youth serve alongside other community members. Members of the IAG advise the Boston Redevelopment Authority on the impact of the project. They offer suggestions on the types of mitigating benefits that would most help the community.

Sociedad Latina's Youth Community Organizers plan to focus on the community benefits received by Mission Hill organizations during the development process, especially making sure the funds stay in the Mission Hill neighborhood. "It's important that youth understand what institutions and hospitals not only take from the community in regards to space with expansion projects, but also what they provide specifically to benefit the Mission Hill community," stated Melissa Luna, Director of Community Organizing at Sociedad Latina.

Feliciano said he also sees a need for more involvement from the residents of Mission Main and Alice Taylor. "It's hurtful as a member of Mission Main to not see our voices there," said Feliciano about the need for more residents, including youth, at the development meetings.

The Youth Community Organizers program is currently hiring. Interested youth should fill out an application at Sociedad Latina's office located at 1530 Tremont Street. Sociedad Latina's mission is to enhance the overall well being of the community by delivering programs that encourage community leadership through educational attainment, cultural identity, and continuation of traditions.

Photo caption: Patricia Flaherty, Senior Project Manager at Mission Hill Neighborhood Housing Services, presents Rafael Feliciano with the first "Youth Leadership of the Year Award" during the annual meeting. Photo courtesy of Sociedad Latina.

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If you'd like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview with Rafael Feliciano, call Dianne K. Pledgie at 617-442-4299 or email dianne@sociedadlatina.org.