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PRESS RELEASE

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FINALISTS FOR THE 26th DON QUIJOTE AWARDS ANNOUNCED

The Don Quijote Awards are the premier business and professional recognition for the Hispanic business community in Central Florida

ORLANDO, FL (November 15, 2023)— The Hispanic Chamber of Metro Orlando and Prospera, the two largest Hispanic economic development organizations in Central Florida, proudly revealed the names of finalists of the four Don Quijote Awards categories, along with this year's Lifetime Achievement and Hispanic Community Champion award recipients, during a press conference that was held at the Winter Park Library. The press conference was sponsored by Walt Disney World Resort, Wells Fargo, and OUC – The Reliable One.

The Don Quijote Awards recognizes and celebrates outstanding achievements and contributions made by individuals and businesses that have demonstrated excellence, innovation, and leadership within the Hispanic business sector. **The winner of each category will be announced at the 26th Don Quijote Awards Celebration on Saturday, December 9, 2023, at Epcot's World Showplace Pavilion** from 6:00 pm until midnight.

Yamile Luna, Chair of the 26th Don Quijote Awards Gala and Chief Operating Officer at AdventHealth Winter Garden and Clermont revealed the names of the following finalists and honorees (in alphabetical order per category):

HISPANIC BUSINESS OF THE YEAR, FIVE YEARS OR LESS:

- **BOLD Hispanic Marketing Agency**, represented by its owner, Ana Carolina Salazar
- **Hispanic Insurance Specialists, LLC**, represented by its owner Luis Vargas
- **Wintermere Pointe Animal Hospital**, represented by its owner Dr. Pedro Santiago

HISPANIC BUSINESS OF THE YEAR, MORE THAN FIVE YEARS:

- **CG Dentist Orlando**, Represented by its owners Dr. Carlos Gurreonero and Dr. Susan Cruzalegui
- **Competitive Edge Partners & Consulting**, represented by its owner Debbie Rodriguez
- **Mecatos Bakery and Café**, represented by its owner Edwin Lurduy

PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR:

- **Dr. Cyndia Muñiz**, Senior Director of Hispanic Serving Institution Initiatives and Partnerships at the University of Central Florida
- **Diahann Smith**, Director of Marketing and Business Development Communications at Florida Dairy Farmers
- **Felipe Sousa-Lazaballet**, Executive Director at Hope Community Center

EXCELLENCE AWARD:

- **Dr. Isis Artze-Vega**, College Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs at Valencia College
- **Melissa Marantes**, Executive Director, and co-founder of Orlando Center for Justice
- **Dr. Maria Vázquez**, Orange County Public Schools Superintendent

The Don Quijote Awards Selection Committee uniquely chooses the Hispanic Community Champion and Lifetime Achievement awards recipients.

HISPANIC COMMUNITY CHAMPION AWARD - This award is given to a non-Hispanic individual who has led by example in supporting the progress of the Hispanic community in Central Florida. The recipient of this award is chosen by the Don Quijote Awards Selection Committee, focusing on contributions to the Hispanic community; evidence of promoting Hispanic

professionals, executives, and board members within the nominee's respective organization and in the general community; demonstrated leadership or community involvement to benefit the Hispanic community; and honors or awards.

The 2023 Don Quijote Hispanic Community Champion Award winner is Jeff Hayward, President and CEO of Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) - Since 2016, Jeff has led HFUW Central Florida's largest supporter of local health and human service agencies. He oversees more than \$50 million in total resources invested in the community to provide support in education, health, financial stability, and basic needs. Immediately after Hurricane Maria, Jeff established a close working relationship with his counterpart at Fondos Unidos de Puerto Rico. In response to the needs identified, HFUW sent 5,000 solar lights, 3,000 reusable water filtration units, and 1,000 solar phone chargers. A Welcome Center was established at Orlando International Airport, and HFUW and about a dozen other organizations greeted and assisted evacuees, with 1,800-2,000 arriving every day. HFUW provided transportation, emergency housing, security deposit fees, and utility deposits.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD - This award recognizes an individual who has made significant and lasting contributions to the development and empowerment of the Hispanic community in Central Florida. **This year's Lifetime Achievement goes to Jan Aspuru, Retired Orlando Utilities Commission Senior Executive.**

As the first Hispanic to serve on the C-level suite of the Orlando Utilities Commission, Jan Aspuru has paved the way for many Hispanic professionals in the utility industry. As Vice President of Electric and Water Generation and then Chief Operational Officer, he designed, developed, and implemented OUC's innovative Fuel Price Hedging Program, which manages market price volatility of OUC's \$300 million to \$400 million annual fuel budget. He oversaw the construction and commissioning of the \$220M Stanton Unit B project that began as a coal-gasification plant and turned into a 300-megawatt natural gas-fired combined cycle facility, and he enhanced and expanded OUC's generation portfolio and set in motion the methodical growth of the chilled water operations while improving OUC's water quality and control, and management, among many more accomplishments.

The Don Quijote Awards are made possible thanks to the support of Walt Disney World Resort, Wells Fargo, OUC- The Reliable One, 1st SOS Staffing, AdventHealth, Bank of America, Duke Energy, Florida Blue, Universal Orlando Resort, Orlando Health, Travel and Leisure, VyStar, Greater Orlando Aviation Authority, Ana G. Mendez University, JP Morgan Chase, The Catholic Foundation of Central Florida, Neurology One, Orlando Magic, iHeart Media, Florida National News, El Osceola Star, Orlando Business Journal, La Prensa Newspaper, Telemundo 31 and Univision Orlando, among many more. For more information on the Don Quijote Awards, please visit www.donquijoteawards.com.

ABOUT THE HISPANIC CHAMBER OF METRO ORLANDO

For over three decades, the Hispanic Chamber of Metro Orlando has been recognized as one of the main economic development entities in the region, serving as the central point of connection, fostering business success, unifying communities, and empowering Hispanic business owners and professionals to drive exceptional economic growth in the region. Hispanic Chamber members benefit from the impact generated by the largest and most engaged business networks in Central Florida. Companies and professionals have access to award-winning events & programs focused on commerce opportunities, coaching, and community development opportunities. For more information please visit www.hispanicchamber.net or call 407-428-5870.

ABOUT PROSPERA

Prospera is an economic development, nonprofit organization that since 1991 has specialized in providing Hispanic entrepreneurs bilingual assistance to establish or expand their business. In the last five years alone, Prospera has facilitated over \$70 million in loans, trained over 17,300 entrepreneurs, and helped consulting clients create or retain over 16,000 jobs. Prospera currently serves Florida, North Carolina, and Georgia. For more information, visit www.prosperausa.org or call 407-428-5872.

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