

KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY

Areyto Project brings Latino Pride to KU

KU establishes Areyto Project which can enable students to win a scholarship.

By Mary Kay Bauman, The Keystone

Areyto is a term used hundreds of years ago by natives throughout the Caribbean and South America. It is a call to action and a calling together of leaders. On Wednesday, Sept. 17 at 5p.m., the SUB became home to the beginnings of KU's very own Areyto Project. This project is a brainchild of Assistant Director of Admissions Carlos Ojeda, Jr. and Assistant Director of Financial Aid Jose Molina. The project was developed to help with the retention of Latino students at KU, but also to expose the community to the Latino culture.

Approximately 125 students came to the first session, which was, "a great turnout for the first activity. We spent over an hour in discussion where students could ask questions, and everyone felt so familiar and comfortable, they were even asking Carlos Ojeda personal questions" said Molina.

Molina stated that the overall goal of the project is, "mostly to give the opportunity to students to share skills and experiences that many Latino leaders have." He said that the project itself will hopefully, "help students to feel more welcome to the community, and make them feel like they really belong at Kutztown."

In the following months KU will welcome a series of important Latino speakers. Each speaker will offer their life experience and touch base on different topics. Along with each speech, a Q&A session will follow. Students that attend each session have the opportunity to take notes and write an essay. The winning essay will win a scholarship at the conclusion of the program.

The Latino Caucus at KU combined efforts with Ojeda and Molina to raise funds for the project and scholarship. Although the Latino Caucus is not directly affiliated to the university, the school and organization are working hand-in-hand to make this program successful.

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Pedro A. Cortes, Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, was the first speaker to kick off the Areyto Project. Cortes was born and raised in Puerto Rico, and attended public school all his life where English was taught for one hour everyday. When speaking about his family, Cortes says, "My mother, in my eyes, was the most intelligent person I know." Cortes came to the United States and became a Legal Studies major at the University of Massachusetts. After graduation, Cortes moved to Pennsylvania with his wife, where he took his first job working at a movie theatre.

Throughout the years, Cortes has moved through a series of jobs to lead him where he is today. He has worked as an income maintenance case worker, served as a board member for his local Hispanic Center and he was Executive Director of the Governor's Latino Commission. Now he is Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. When asked if his job is stressful, Cortes replies, "No, my job is not stressful. Stress is being unemployed and not being able to feed my family." Cortes ended his speech with a Q&A session between the students and himself.

On a personal note, Molina stated that with four children of his own attending KU, "I don't just want to see myself as their role model. I want my children to be able to look up to other leaders that can also serve as guides."

A few students had some comments to make on what they thought of the program. Nicole Yeager, sophomore, International Business major said, "The program was excellent, very inspirational and motivational." Lizzette Mejia, freshman, Secondary Education major said, "I thought it was inspiring, I'm proud to be here." The Areyto Project will continue here at KU, calling together the leaders of today and the leaders of tomorrow, spreading a positive message for the future.

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