

► Health Care For All honors business and Latino organization for their groundbreaking approach in improving the health of Massachusetts' communities

Celebrating 30 years of health care access in MA

By Maritza Merino

Affordable health care has been a nationwide concern and has definitely been in the minds of almost everyone in the state of Massachusetts. This was the case on Wednesday, April 15th when over 550 government officials, health care executives, business leaders and consumers gathered together at the Westin Hotel in Boston for the inauguration of Health Care For All's (HCFA) 30th anniversary campaign, which celebrates the progress made in health care access and quality in Massachusetts and also looks at the work to be done in order to make it more affordable for all.

One of HCFA's main goals was to provide health care for everyone living in the state of Massachusetts. This goal was nearly reached. "With more than 96% of adults in the state covered, HCFA remains determined to create a system that meets the needs of all consumers, including our most vulnerable," said Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Executive Director of Health Care For All. "Now our next goal is to minimize the cost. This will take a lot of work, but we believe health care should be not only accessible, but also affordable to all."

During the event, HCFA honored an exemplary business leader and a community-based organization dedicated to making



► From left to right, Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Executive Director of Health Care For All; the awardee Ari Haseotes of Framingham-based Cumberland Farms; former Governor Michael Dukakis and his wife Kitty.

a positive impact in people's lives.

Ari Haseotes, Chief Executive Officer of Framingham-based Cumberland Farms, received the Health Care Leadership Award for his commitment to providing health care access to thousands of employees.

"I am honored to accept this award from Health Care For All on behalf of the more than 7,000 team members in our company. Expanding health care coverage was not only the right thing to do for our team members, it was the right thing to do for our business, too," said Ari Haseotes, CEO of Cumberland Farms.

"We've continued to invest in our people in areas like health insurance because we have a core belief that our people truly make us successful everyday. As a business, we need to make sure that our team members are happy, healthy

and feel valued," Haseotes said.

Haseotes extended health insurance to 1,500 additional employees during a time when many other business leaders were cutting down benefits as a means to reducing costs. "Those considering to eliminate benefits



► Joana Dos Santos Executive Director of the United Neighbors of Fitchburg, organization who received an award during the 30th anniversary of HCFA.

should keep in mind that in order for any company to be successful, it must think holistically and consider all three stakeholders: the shareholders, team members, and consumers," said Haseotes.

Haseotes continued, "In order to provide the best place to shop, we must first create the best place to work. We are a team, and it is a mutual commitment. Our team members know that we will invest in them just as much as they will invest in us."

United Neighbors of Fitchburg (UNF) was the other honoree of the evening. UNF became the third recipient of the John Auerbach Community Leadership Award, which is given to an organization or individual for its outstanding commitment to improving the health and lives of vulnerable populations in Massachusetts.

UNF is a non-profit organization that has been in existence for 50 years, providing its community members with the tools necessary to succeed in life.

UNF partnered with HCFA in an unprecedented effort to raise awareness about the various health care options during the last open enrollment period. In three months, UNF passed its initial goal of knocking on 15,000 doors and reached 16,000. During the campaign, HCFA joined forces with 11 regional partners in a statewide effort to knock on 200,000 doors. With over 100 determined canvassers, HCFA was able to reach 413,000 households.

"It is such a pleasure for the United Neighbors of Fitchburg to receive this meaningful award," said Joana Dos Santos, Executive Director of the United Neighbors of Fitchburg.

"Working with HCFA has been instrumental in educating our constituencies about health insurance, in a linguistically and culturally appropriate way, so that they can get healthy and stay healthy."

Dos Santos continued, "HCFA has the capacity, resources, and vision to ensure that the whole state is included in their educational and access campaigns. Usually, not many resources and programs leave the city of Boston. Therefore, being included in this statewide campaign was of tremendous help for our community. Now we can only hope this opens the doors to other statewide campaigns where our community can once again be included."