

USPS UNVEILS MENDEZ V. WESTMINSTER 60TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIVE STAMP AT APM SUGAR CANE FESTIVAL

PHILADELPHIA, PA—The 2007 Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha Sugar Cane Festival, which promotes community empowerment by promoting health and housing access, served as the platform for the unveiling of the United States Postal Service's newest tribute to Latino history, the Mendez v. Westminster commemorative stamp, marking the landmark decision's 60th anniversary. The groundbreaking legal case was brought forth by a group of civic-minded Latino parents who successfully sued four Orange County school districts to end segregation in California schools. This 1947 victory went on to become a legal precedent for broader decisions involving segregation nationwide, and was supported on appeal by Thurgood Marshall, who later used it to support the case for Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. Marshall later became the first African-American to serve on the United States Supreme Court.

APM President and CEO Nilda Ruiz was intent on bringing the unveiling and the documentary, *Mendez v. Westminster: For all children/Para todos los niños*, to Philadelphia "because of what it means to all of our history" and in celebration of the accomplishments of the Latino community in our country's civil-rights history. Though Philadelphia's Latino community is predominately Puerto Rican, a recent rise in the City's Mexican population has challenged Latino community leaders intent on addressing the needs of this immigrant population. Nelia Castillo, former President and current Board Member of the Mexican Cultural Center, also participated in the unveiling.

The documentary, which was screened on June 26th, showed how Asian, Jewish, and African-American support for the Mendez v. Westminster case brought communities together to overcome segregation in California, and later, the nation. Moving beyond segregated classrooms, the documentary also revealed segregated swimming pools and housing, which drew a parallel to the alleged discrimination being faced by Mexicans and other Latinos today in Hazleton, PA. "The Mendez family is a perfect example of what can be accomplished when obstacles are turned into stepping stones. A family with a Puerto Rican mother and a Mexican father who fought injustice for their children wound up fighting injustice for us all. There are a lot of lessons for Philadelphia's Latino community in this case—intercultural collaboration being the most significant," explained Ruiz.

APM, once founded as a Puerto Rican social service agency nearly four decades ago, has itself progressed to now serve and work towards meeting the needs of *everyone*. The Sugar Cane Festival, which is an homage to early Puerto Rican history of workers in the sugar cane fields, is used to celebrate APM's breadth of health and housing services in its surrounding community. More than 30 health and housing vendors participated in the festival. APM has itself built more than 100 new homes in the Eastern North Philadelphia neighborhood and runs 4 health clinics, providing primary care, elderly care, mental health, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation services to thousands.