

APM 35th ANNIVERSARY
President's Address Nilda Ruiz
November 12, 2005
Philadelphia, Pa.

Thank You Nelson.

Well tonight I have a million reasons to thank Nelson Diaz and I'll tell you why in a minute. I certainly couldn't have had a finer introduction from a finer person. Thank you, Nelson, for your kind introduction and support.

Good evening Honored Guests, Elected Officials,

[VIP List

Police Commissioner Sylvester Johnson, DHS Commissioner Cheryl Ramsay, Director of Housing Kevin Hannah, Senator Shirley Kitchen, Councilman Juan Ramos, Roberto Santiago of Concillio, Bill Salas of HACE, Pat DeCarlo of Norris Square, Nick Torres of Congresso, Carlos Matos from Senator Tina Tartaglione's office, our sponsors to whom we are so grateful: Wachovia, Marcos Lopez of Exude, Tabb Bishop of Temple University, American Airlines, Allied Construction, Beneficial Bank, Citizen's bank, Commerce Bank, Hudson bank, Federal Home Loan bank of Pittsburgh, Nick's Real Estate, the Philadelphia Housing Authority, KDN Insurance, Dan Cuellar of WPVI, Maria Quinones, Ken Trujillo, Diego Castellanos of Puerto Rican Panorama, APM Camden, Grizel Ubarry, Luz Cardenas]

I am so deeply appreciative for your presence here tonight. It sends such a wonderful message of unity. It so beautifully acknowledges our mutual concerns and sends a highly prized message of commitment, dedication, respect and cooperation.

Dear Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen [greet in Spanish]

This 35th anniversary of the founding of the Asociacion Puertorriquenos En Marcha marks an incredibly important milestone for us *and* in the history of Latinos in this city. We are here today because all those years ago, with a far more entrenched racism at work, our founders were able to forge ahead of the prevailing society. They carved out quality health care, community development, and cultural enrichment-**for themselves**.

And **we** are the better for it. We are the beneficiaries of their foresight and diligence.

Right now, we are all working very hard, but I never forget, it is a rare privilege to continue such historic, hallowed and blessed work. In 1970, when APM was founded, what passed for normal seems like a whole different planet today. There were no Black astronauts, no female commercial pilots of any color, there were no Latino Pennsylvania legislators, no Philadelphia city council members or United States Commerce Secretaries or Attorneys General and no Hispanic big city mayors. That same year still had all the social ills that plagued this country for far too long. In 1970, APM's founders did not listen for one moment to the winds of indifference whistling through the corridors of power. They didn't care for one minute that the powers-that-be had small minds. Small enough so when they

heard the word 'Latino', all they thought about were factory workers, janitors and waitresses. Today, when I need to hire the finest managerial talent, I have people of all colors and ethnic backgrounds with the finest credentials applying for those jobs. Our own Chief Financial officer is a stunning example of excellence through diversity. Rasak Azeez is a highly capable and talented man originally from Nigeria, now here with us. His financial abilities and social sensibilities make him a perfect fit as APM's Vice President of Finances.

It is also fitting that we are holding this celebration during our Children's Christmas Benefit. Our commitment to children keeps us ever-mindful of the present needs of our society, and the urgency of meeting those needs to secure a better future for all of us.

What we have done to improve the health of our community, our accomplishments in rehabilitation and our creativity in economic development are the things of which dreams are made. This extraordinary trailblazing effort would never have happened without a courageous Board of Directors and an amazingly dedicated and knowledgeable staff. Without them, this organization would not be where it is today.

Would all the APM staff and Banquet Committee please stand up and let us thank you.

The programs we have in place are an extraordinary cross section of everything needed to improve and enlighten a society. And we did it ourselves.

And like our name, we are on the march with an ambitious array of new programs.

We have just received one million dollars from the Blank, Rome law firm, via the city's tax credit program. Nelson Diaz helped secure this huge amount of money for us.

It will enable new housing, community development and economic initiatives. It gives us vital operating dollars which are so hard to come by in this business. We are all deeply grateful.

And Nelson, you are one of the trailblazers I've been talking about. What you've done is just outstanding. And it's not just for me or APM, but will impact the entire Philadelphia community and Hispanics in particular. It's for all of us. Nelson, would you stand up so we can thank you...

Clearly, APM is now embarking on a very dynamic course. I am extremely pleased to announce our Five Year Strategic Initiative. This effort, undertaken by our Board of Directors and I, is an ambitious, comprehensive plan which ushers in a new era of progress for APM. We have spent the last nine months reviewing our operations, strategies, and fiscal performance. Accordingly, we have restructured our internal operations and executive management team.

As many of you know, work continues on our new headquarters which will be ready in March 2007. This state of the art facility will give us a strong and proper home for the community strengthening work that we do.

And while it is really wonderful to talk about our own new office building, I don't forget for one minute how this all started. When we were founded, our one and

only office was located at 2247 North Germantown Avenue. It was from that humble location that APM expanded from a staff of **five** to an organization that today employs over 190 bilingual/bicultural professionals at over **23 sites**.

And our personnel serve over nine thousand people a year.

Back in the old days, our budget was a pittance compared to today.

Over the years, we've grown from a tiny company, to a 13 million dollar a year health and construction consortium. That's a four million dollar increase just since my arrival and we just got started. We're expanding our donor base to increase the budget growth by half. Our board will be working with a full 15 members. They'll ensure that APM's vision is guided by sound policies. In addition we are creating a new advisory board comprised of corporations, foundations and influential leaders to help us identify additional funding and bolster our visibility. We are also working on two new housing partnerships with the Philadelphia Housing Authority. We will be the lead case management agency in charge of all assessments. And on Monday, you can join us at ground-breaking ceremonies on 53 houses we are building at 18th and Franklin. We are building these low income housing units for the benefit of 53 families because that's what needed and APM fulfills those needs. We have been a housing and community development leader for over 15 years. Rose Gray and her entire staff are to be commended for APM's accomplishments. When you provide the dream of home ownership, you are not only fulfilling dreams, you're empowering lives.

Elsewhere, I have found our skills and expertise maybe needed beyond Philadelphia. Therefore, we are exploring the possibility of providing technical assistance to facilities in other sections our state and neighboring New Jersey as

well. In fact, Camden APM has reached out to us and we are discussing working on programs together. By combining our resources and skills we will benefit the two communities with river-to-river coverage.

On the financial services front, we are so pleased that NCLR chose APM to initiate and build a pilot program of Economic Mobility Centers in Philadelphia. This is a first for us. We are going to teach people how to save and actually earn more money. We're going to take people who are currently unbankable and turn them into productive, responsible banking clients with financial standing in the community. These centers will not only shed financial light, they will go a very long way toward restoring people's self respect and dignity. They will shed the light of financial independence. Also, APM was the only organization in Pennsylvania chosen by NCLR to head up this national pilot program. They are depending on us because they know we will deliver. They know we will deliver the financial and social service expertise which will promote this program's benefits *nationwide*.

We are unveiling a cutting-edge website to tell the world about APM. We are also creating an integrated marketing and communications plan for all programs and services throughout our organization.

Every program I have mentioned is available to all our fellow citizens. We lend our aid and support to anyone in need, regardless of race, national origin or ethnic background. APM is there for everyone. To highlight our inclusive progressive plans for the future, I would like to unveil our new logo which captures our mission-an APM that serves everyone.

[unveil logo]

It is so heartening to be a part of such a visionary and dynamic enterprise. A strength building program like this gives us all a great sense of purpose. I never forget the beauty of our mission. It is as multifaceted and diverse as the people we help. We create job opportunities, help folks with debilitating diseases, support families and people with our caring, compassionate and comprehensive array of life-improving services. I feel very fortunate to have my heartfelt concerns about our community, matched by an organization which can effectively move our agenda of amelioration forward. APM is a powerful engine, a great social institution with a long history of fighting for the betterment of our community.

And that fight is not easy.

Here's a picture I have etched in my mind. It's why our mission and co-workers mean so much to me.

In just one year, our front-line staff handles thousands of heart-wrenching cases. Our people are constantly engaged in quiet heroics. Everyday they witness some of the most devastating human circumstances. They do not run away. They do not turn away. Every day, these foot-soldiers tackle these life altering problems with professionalism and compassion.

I almost didn't use the word 'foot-soldier' here, because I didn't want people to fail to see the extraordinary leadership displayed by our staff on a daily, sometimes hourly, basis.

From my office to the field, we are *all* foot-soldiers in this noble and difficult battle to restore or strengthen people's health and social stamina. When you are called

upon to break into an apartment where someone has overdosed on deadly drugs, or you come upon a patient suffering with AIDS who's too weak to take a shower by themselves, or a sobbing baby frightened by the actions of unworthy parents- you are displaying immense courage. Then you stay right there, grappling to solve these problems for hours, days, weeks, months. Trying to help that person get back on their feet is a yeoman's effort of epic proportions. This is God's work we are doing and I don't lose sight of that for one moment. Our actions on behalf of the least of our brothers and sisters send multiple signals between our people, to our neighbors, to the Halls of Congress and The Heavens. It says we are here not just helping with one crisis, but here helping with whatever crises come to our attention. We do not shudder. We do not flinch. We answer every call. We lend that nurturing hand. When we do that, we help guarantee the health and future of our entire community. Who among us can say what tomorrow may bring.?.

I am comforted by the philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who said,

"Every man must decide whether he will walk in the creative light of altruism or the darkness of destructive selfishness. This is the judgment. Life's persistent and most urgent question is 'What are you doing for others ?' "

[pause]

I know what we are doing for others. I know the new heights we are scaling. I know our commitment and vision secures a more promising future for our community. It is evident in every program we develop. Our 20th century successes will be doubled in the 21st. I am so pleased to be part of this united effort. We are all very fortunate to be able to watch and guide APM -- now entering its second century of progress and excellence for humanity.

Thank You All.