

Fast-food owner, advocate earn minority business awards

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By Myron Kukla

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HOLLAND -- The Hispanic owner of three McDonald's restaurants and a longtime supporter of minority opportunities and diversity received the Holland Chamber of Commerce's first minority business awards.

During an awards luncheon Wednesday at Hope College in Holland, Tony Castillo received the Chamber's Business Connections award for Minority Business of the Year while retired Hope College instructor Herb Weller was recognized as Outstanding Advocate for Minority Owned Business.

The awards were presented by WOOD-TV (Channel 8) Communications Director Eva Aguirre Cooper. Guest speaker Hope College Associate Provost Alfredo Gonzales said the awards were a reflection of growing opportunities for minorities in business in the West Michigan area.

"People of color are now finding opportunities where they can provide needed services and be welcomed by the entire community," Gonzales said.

He also praised the Holland Chamber for creating programs that help minority businesses get established and flourish.

Castillo is an advocate of minority projects such as the Tulipanes Latin Art and Film Festival in West Michigan, of which he is president of the board.

Castillo, 55, and wife Virginia Castillo own Holland-area McDonald's at East Eighth Street, Riley and U.S. 31 and North River Avenue.

The three restaurants employ 150 people with a staff ratio of 65 percent minority staff.

"The greatest joy for me in business has nothing to do with the (profit and loss) statement. It happens when an employee tells me they are buying a house or a car or finishing college. To me, that is the success of a company," said Castillo who was a high school teacher and an executive with Macmillan Publishing prior to becoming a franchise owner in 1992.

A New Mexico native, Castillo has also owned restaurants in Wyoming and Los Alamos, New Mexico.

Castillo has had been active in the Holland community since he arrived in 2001 and has been on the Executive Board of Holland Chamber and the Board of West Michigan Strategic Alliance. He also was on the Board of the Holland Boys and Girls Club.

"I jumped into community activities with both feet from the moment I landed in Holland," Castillo said. "Holland in a very short time has become my home."

Weller, 72, is a retired Hope College Spanish professor and owner of Weller Language Services in Holland. He has been on the Holland Chamber Ambassador and Business Connection committees and the group's diversity task force.

He also is a member of the Holland International Relations Commission; an interpreter for Justice for Our Neighbors, a legal assistance service for immigrants; and a founding member of the Alliance for Cultural and Ethnic Harmony.

"Herb volunteers many hours (each) year on projects that help foster an inclusive community (and) he is also an avid supporter of minority businesses," said Eleanor Lopez, Health Infosource Coordinator at Holland Hospital, who nominated Weller.

Born and raised in Holland, Weller became interested in languages as a child and pursued language studies at University of Michigan and Indiana University, where he received master's and doctorate's degrees in Spanish.

A first generation American from Dutch immigrant parents, Weller has taken love of languages and used it to help Hispanic and other minorities find acceptance in West Michigan.

"I want to help make Holland a welcoming community for everyone regardless of their ethnic backgrounds," Weller said.

"I am surprised and pleased by the award, but I know there are a lot of other people in the community who are doing a lot on behalf of promoting diversity within the community that are equally deserving," Weller said.