

January 30, 2006

CULTURAL AWARENESS AFTER SCHOOL

Maria Rico is going on her ninth year of service at El Centro de la Raza. She is the Luis Alfonso Velasquez Flores After School Program Coordinator and says, "This is my life, and it doesn't stop when I leave El Centro." That outlook is what made Maria the 2005 Employee of the Year. Maria recently returned from a 41-day vacation to Mexico, a vacation she takes every year to visit family. She visited Guanajuato, Guadalajara, and Mexico City with her husband and daughter.



While her trip was a family vacation, Maria took the opportunity to purchase some culturally relevant items for the children to use in the after school program with a portion of the \$3,000 Quality Education grant money that the after school program received from School's Out Washington to enhance the after school program. Some of these items include: Mexican furniture, paintings, small objects the children can count, Aztec calendars, pictures and biographies of historical Mexican figures, various ethnic materials and decorative items you would find in a Mexican house. The paintings represent children in the classroom and will grace the walls of the after school facility. Maria also returned with resources for the teachers as well.



Maria wanted many of these items to provide hands-on learning experiences for the children. She has also purchased math and reading kits for the students and will be incorporating materials from other cultures into the program. The children will learn about the items and about traditions and values in other cultures to more fully develop their cultural awareness and understanding.