



On September 1, 2022, the University of Miami-Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (UM-NSU CARD) held its 17th Annual Community Awards luncheon at the University of Miami to honor 16 members of South Florida's autism community for their tireless dedication, fearless persistence, and philanthropic support.



"The UM-NSU CARD Community Awards were created in 2005 to recognize the community leaders and partners who go the extra mile for our constituents. We greatly appreciate all that they do," said Dr. Michael Alessandri who is the Executive Director of UM-NSU CARD. "Without them, our job of serving more than 15,000 constituents throughout Broward, Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties would be that much more difficult. We are indebted to them for their service."



In addition to our annual award winners, Representatives Michael Grieco and Daniel Perez received the Champion Award for leading the path and being our voice in Tallahassee. ***To our surprise, we also received a generous \$20,000 donation from Representative Michael Grieco!***

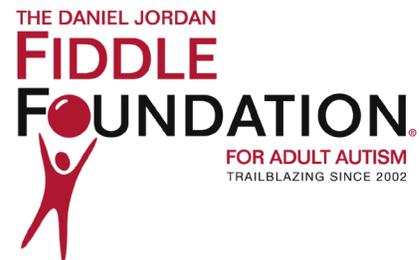
"We hope that our award winners' example of action in the community inspires many others to get involved and support the South Florida autism community," said Alessandri.

2022 UM-NSU CARD COMMUNITY AWARDS

Special Recognition Awards for Community Service were given to **Leandro Beer** and the **Hedelund Family**. Leandro is being recognized for six years of service on the UM-NSU CARD Constituency Board, as well as his leadership of the organization as Constituency Board Chair during the very difficult years of the pandemic and the Hedelund Family is being recognized for their tireless efforts in supporting training for first responders in the State of Florida.



Outstanding Philanthropist Award was given to **The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation (DJFF)**. Founder, **Linda Walder**, and DJFF were recognized for not only giving UM-NSU CARD an endowed fund supporting and naming our Transition and Adult Services Division, but also for their deep and enduring belief in us from the very start. The DJFF has endowed funds at five prominent universities (UM, Yale, Rutgers, Brown, and Arizona State).



Outstanding School Partner Awards were given to **Broward Avionics** and **Michael Rodriguez**. Under the leadership of **Russel McCaffery** (in photo), Broward College Avionics paved the way for our very own adult UM-NSU CARD constituents to successfully graduate and become employed. Michael, a former classroom teacher for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, was recognized for his passion for supporting students with autism and teachers in inclusive and self-contained classroom settings, and for being a wonderful CARD collaborator and partner.





Outstanding Business Partner Award was given to **SPECTRUM TECH**. They were honored this year for their work in training and employing autistic adults in the areas of quality assurance and ADA testing.



Outstanding Volunteer Awards were given to **The Firpo Family** and **Valeria Palacios**. The Firpo Family has participated in various UM-NSU CARD support groups and community events like Teen Time, Gals Group, Parent Trainings, Family Day at Zoo Miami and Bowling Nights. They are a family that loves to help, and we are grateful for their ongoing participation in our services! Valeria was recognized for her devotion of countless hours to help UM-NSU CARD related research activities by helping children and families. She also provided hands-on support to children with autism at the Intensive Behavioral Intervention Services (IBIS) clinic and at UM-NSU CARD events, and recently served as a camp counselor at the UM-NSU CARD Explorers Summer Camp.



Unsung Hero Awards were given to **Maria Lis De Gasperi** and **Julliana Carranza Escobar**. Maria Lis has been part of the UM-NSU CARD family for 17 years. Maria Lis goes above and beyond to make sure CARD runs as smooth as possible. Julliana has made it her mission to bring autism acceptance and training to law enforcement officers, as well as city officials. Her goal has been to bring community members together to establish a better understanding of autism, support better outcomes of police interactions, build trust in our families, and create a more inclusive city for all.





Outstanding Self Advocate Award was given to **Kent Schomber**. Kent plays an important role as a self-advocate and ambassador for UM-NSU CARD within the University of Miami and in the broader community. Kent is a long-time member of the Mailman Center Advisory Council (MAC). He was also a key member of The Wallet Card project, developed by Disability Independence Group (DIG), where he starred in the training videos.



Robin Parker Inspiration Award was given to **Silvia Gil**. Silvia shined first in our Educational Division and then as the Manager of Transition and Adult Services Division where she has spearheaded major outreach, employment, and community engagement initiatives for UM-NSU CARD. Her commitment to the work, her boundless energy, her leadership and commitment to her team, and her love of our clients and their families is what resonates most with her colleagues.

