

# **NYATEP RECOGNIZES LATINX/HISPANIC WORKFORCE LEADERS FOR** *National Hispanic Heritage Month*



**Jason Benitez**  
**Vice President, Talent, Diversity and Inclusion**  
**Capital Region Chamber**  
**Capital Region**

Jason Benitez joined the Capital Region Chamber in July of 2019. As Vice President of Talent, Diversity and Inclusion, he is responsible for assisting businesses and organizations in the Capital Region, in finding, attracting and retaining diverse talent from a multitude of backgrounds. Benitez also works to advance the strategic mission of the Chamber, relevant to the areas of both Talent Development, as well as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The Capital Region Chamber believes that full potential is realized when diversity, equity and inclusion are the standards upon which we strengthen and impact our businesses and communities. As an advocate for regional businesses, the Chamber – through its leadership, actions, educational programming and community collaboration – is committed to cultivating inclusive economic opportunity for all who call our region home.

Jason previously worked for 15+ years in Higher Education, at 3 local institutions, UAlbany, SUNY Schenectady and most recently, Union College, where he spent 8 years as Associate Dean of Diversity and Inclusion. While at Union, Jason's efforts assisted the College in being recognized with the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award (HEED), given by Insight Into Diversity, for 6 consecutive years.

Benitez holds a Bachelors, Masters, and Certificate of Advanced Study, all from UAlbany. He lives in Slingerlands with his wife and 2 children.



**Sue Rosa**  
**Vice President**  
**Commission on Economic Opportunity (CEO)**  
**Capital Region**

Sue Rosa is the Vice President of the Commission on Economic Opportunity (CEO), in Troy, NY, a Community Action Organization that works with individuals and families in Rensselaer county to achieve self-sufficiency and economic mobility. Sue, a Puerto Rican native from the Bronx, arrived in the Capital District in 1985, where she earned her BA from Russell Sage in Public

Administration. She has remained a dedicated servant of community action for the past 30 year, impacting the lives of thousands throughout her long standing career with CEO. Sue is married with two children; a proud mother of a young adult with Autism and special needs, as well as a son who is about to begin a military career. She presently sits on the board of the Rensselaer County ARC, demonstrating her continued commitment and support of agencies working each day to make a difference in the lives of our local residents.



**Alejandro Mendoza (MS,SHRM-CP)**  
**Director of Human Resources**  
**Optimax Systems**  
**Finger Lakes Region**

Alejandro (Ale') Mendoza is the Director of Human Resources at Optimax Systems Inc, a precision optics manufacturer, located in Ontario, New York. In this role, he is part of the Board of Directors at Optimax and focuses on aligning the company's strategic goals and culture with a growing workforce.

Before joining Optimax, Ale' was a member of the United States Air Force, where he served in a variety of specialized roles. His military career included assignments with Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training, Space Surveillance, and Aircrew Life Support systems and training.

In addition to his current role at Optimax, Ale' has a passion for collaborating and building relationships with workforce development organizations. Ale' serves the local community as a member of the Finger Lakes Advanced Manufacturing Enterprise (FAME), the Finger Lakes Community College foundation board and the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce HR Executive forum while regionally, he's a member of the NY state workforce strategy group – Invest in skills NY coalition and nationally, he serves as a board member of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions and partners with the National Skills Coalition and Business Leaders United, including a member of their Manufacturing Industry Recovery Panel.

He holds an associate degree from Monroe Community College (MCC), a bachelor's degree from the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), and a master's degree from St. John Fisher College.



**Rosa Murciano**  
**Regional Executive**  
**New York Community Bank**  
**Long Island Region**

Rosa Murciano currently serves as a Regional Executive at New York Community Bank. Her career began in 1986 as a teller in Queens County Savings Bank, a division of New York Community Bank. Rosa quickly rose through the branch network ranks to her current position as a Regional Executive. She played a pivotal role in branch openings and relocations for Queens County Savings Bank, particularly in the De-novo (new branch)

locations. In her current position, Rosa oversees the operations of two Regions comprising of 35 branch locations and over 300 employees throughout Nassau County and Northeast Queens.

Throughout her tenure, Rosa has played a lead role within the community by working on charitable events to raise funds for such organizations as the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, Thomas Hartman Foundation for Parkinson's Research, Go Red for Women, March of Dimes, Island Harvest and numerous other good causes. Rosa graduated from St. Johns University in Queens with a Bachelor's Degree in Marketing. She is a former member of the Jackson Heights Neighborhood Association and the Flushing Chamber of Commerce and Business Association. Currently, Rosa serves on the Town of Hempstead Local Workforce Development Board and is a Committee Member for various committees including the Youth Standing Committee and the Pathways to Employment Workgroup.

Rosa is happily married to her husband of twenty three years, Morris and loves spending time with her four children Michael, Jake, Stefani and Gabrielle.



**C. Sonia Martinez**  
**Co-Founder/President/Chairman/Executive Director**  
**Mohawk Valley Latino Association, Inc.**  
**Mohawk Valley Region**

Carmen Sonia Martinez was born in the Dominican Republic and came to the United States in 1972, settling in the South Bronx, New York City. She later moved to Herkimer County, attended Herkimer County Community College, and graduated with an A.A.S degree in Travel & Tourism. Her 27 year career was in healthcare, working at Excellus BCBS until 2013, worked for the Utica City Schools District, as a Spanish Academic Coach until March 2019, and recently accepted the appointment as the first, Executive Director for the Mohawk Valley Latino Association. This has been a goal of Ms. Martinez since she has been in this role for the past 15 years as a volunteer President/Chairman/Executive Director. Ms. Martinez has two children, Cristina and Michael, and three grandchildren, Cristian, Gabriel and Ezequiel, all living in Utica also.

To address the issues of the lack of educational and cultural support services for area Latino residents, she co-founded the Mohawk Valley Latino Association (MVLA) along with three other Latino colleagues. MVLA unites the Latino community and provides coordinated assistance in navigating education, housing, immigration, healthcare, social services, immigration, legal, translation/interpretation, judicial and/or employment basic and emergency needs.

Ms. Martinez is a member of many community boards, such as; Central NY Arts Council, MVCC CSTEP Advisory Board, CABVI, NAACP Oneida County Utica Branch, Black Leadership Coalition, Upstate Family Health Center, SCORE Utica, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, YWCA MV, Herkimer College Foundation Board, Utica Industrial Development Corporation, On Point for College Advisory Board, SOMOS NY, and the Upstate Latino Alliance. She was named a member of the Utica's Mayoral Transition Team of the City of Utica by Mayor Robert Palmieri, is a Oneida County History Center Living Legend 2017 award and received a proclamation from NYS Comptroller, Thomas

DiNapoli and NYS Assemblyman, Marco Crespo, Chair, Puerto Rican Hispanic Task Force. In the fall of 2017, Ms. Martinez received the Oneida County History Center Living Legends Award. She has also been recognized by the Maranatha Church in Rome as a Latina leader for the 2018 Hispanic Heritage Month, in October 2018, the Genesis Group "Joseph R. Carucci" Legacy award for her dedication to her community, received a NYS Senate Commendation award by Senator Joseph A. Griffo on February 6, 2019. She recently has been selected to appear on the WCNY PBS Show "Behind A Woman" to be interviewed about her leadership role in creating the MV Latino Association in Utica.



**Jose Ortiz, Jr.**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**New York City Employment and Training Coalition (NYCETC)**  
**New York City Region**

Jose Ortiz, Jr. was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the New York City Employment and Training Coalition (NYCETC), the nation's largest city-based membership association for the workforce development industry, in February 2018. An accomplished New York City nonprofit leader, Jose has spent his career building and overseeing programs and initiatives at premier social sector organizations across education, leadership, innovation and workforce development.

Immediately prior to joining NYCETC, Jose served as the Managing Director of External Affairs, Partnerships, and Business Development at Pursuit, a Long Island City based workforce nonprofit that prepares underserved and underprivileged individuals without college degrees for software development jobs at some of the world's most innovative companies. Prior to Pursuit, Jose spent more than a decade at 92Y, a world-class cultural and community center, where he led youth & family programs, leadership initiatives, conferences, and was a founding member of the Belfer Center for Innovation and Social Impact which created the global day of philanthropy, Giving Tuesday.

Jose currently serves on the Board of Directors of The Regional Plan Association, SkillUp and the Human Services Council of New York, as well as on a number of advisory boards including 92Y's Center for Arts Learning and Leadership, The Fund for Public Housing Advisory Council, the Queens Tech Council, and Youth Represents. Jose also served on the Amazon HQ2 Community Advisory Council (CAC), was recently appointed to NYC Mayor de Blasio's Labor and Workforce Sector Advisory Council to inform the administration's efforts to restart the economy and city life, and an Advisory Committee (chaired by Steve Cohen, Co-Chair of NY Forward and Chair of the Board of Empire State Development) to inform the Governor's efforts around economic development planning over the next 18 months.

Jose has testified before the United States Congress' Joint Economic Committee (JEC) on the subject of "Connecting More People to Work". Jose has been covered by The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Politico, Newsweek, Crain's NY, New York Daily News, NPR and MSNBC's Morning Joe, and has appeared on NY1's "Inside City Hall" with Errol Louis and WBAI's "Max & Murphy". Jose was the youngest person to be named to City & State's 2019 Nonprofit Power 100, and named again in 2021. Recently, Jose was named to Crain's New York Business 2021 Notable in Nonprofit and

Philanthropy list, as well as the inaugural class of the Robin Hood Power Fund invests in leaders of color who are “tackling inequities and driving solutions across New York City, while bringing perspective, proximity, and expertise to the fight against poverty.”



**Plinio Ayala**  
**President and CEO**  
**Per Scholas**  
**New York City Region**

The Per Scholas staff is led by CEO and President Plinio Ayala. He was born and raised in the South Bronx just as it grew into a national emblem for urban poverty and disinvestment. His experience instilled a lifelong passion for creating economic opportunity, and shortly after graduating from Wesleyan University with a degree in American Studies, he devoted his career to building “win-win” solutions to social and economic problems, first at Jobs for Youth and then at SoBro, and finally, Per Scholas.

In 2003, he became President and CEO of Per Scholas and has been instrumental in all the organization’s achievements since then -- from evolving its original mission, which was to bridge the digital divide by refurbishing end-of-life computer equipment for new use in families and schools, to its accelerating national growth today. In the process, he has incubated strong organizational capacities to respond to changing market conditions, pursue entrepreneurial opportunities and embrace rigorous measurements of impact. He often says that he can imagine no greater satisfaction than seeing people from diverse backgrounds channel all their capabilities, passion and curiosity into life-transforming careers.

Plinio sits on the boards of the Workforce Professional Training Institute, Economic Mobility Partners, and SoBro. He has also served on the New York State Workforce Recovery Strategy committee since 2020. He has received numerous honors, including the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Community Leader Award in 2019, NewsCorp’s Murdoch Community Hero Award in 2018, and Hispanic Community Leader of the Year by Crain’s New York in 2016, among others.



**Shanna Castillo**  
**Director, Office of Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability**  
**New York City Housing Authority**  
**New York City Region**

Shanna Castillo is Director of the New York City Housing Authority’s (NYCHA) Office of Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability

(REES), where she oversees implementation of NYCHA's outcome-driven resident economic opportunity platform – the Zone Model – a place-based framework for generating economic opportunity and connecting public housing and NYCHA Section 8 residents to critical programs and services. Under her stewardship, REES has grown the number of service coordination zones to 15 zones spanning across public housing in all of New York City and grown its network of high-quality, outcomes-driven local and citywide economic opportunity providers to over 70 organizations. She has also implemented several processes, performance improvements and new award-winning economic opportunity initiatives via public and private funding during her tenure. Prior to her appointment as Director, Shanna held two other leadership positions within REES.

Before joining NYCHA in 2012, Shanna was the Director of Workforce Development Programs at Urban Upbound. In this role she worked to transform a part-time career program into a comprehensive workforce development program serving public housing residents of Western Queens. Ms. Castillo holds a Masters in Public Administration from Bernard Baruch College, School of Public Affairs.

Shanna was raised in public housing in Coney Island, Brooklyn to a Puerto Rican mother and Puerto Rican-Dominican father. She currently lives in Brooklyn with her two daughters and Chilean husband.



**Rosemary Avila**  
**Interim Executive Director**  
**Tompkins County Workforce Development Board**  
**Southern Tier Region**

Rosemary Avila is the Interim Executive Director for Tompkins County Workforce Development Board. She began working for the board as the Deputy Director in the Summer. She previously worked at the Center for Community Alternatives in Syracuse, a non-profit serving individuals returning to the community after incarceration or those with justice involvement with reentry services where she oversaw workforce development programs, grants, and organization and business partnerships. Rosemary worked with the U.S. Department of State overseas where she served in Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, Haiti, and Washington, D.C. in Consular Affairs. Also, she brings to her new role insight from the private sector and multinational organization, such as the CAF- Development Bank of Latin America. Rosemary served as a board member for the Silver Knight Foundation, serving the Central New York Community by creating athletic and creative education youth programs serving the less privileged.

She holds an M.P.A. from Norwich University and an undergraduate degree from University of Florida. A Certificate in International Human Rights from the United Nations, and a Work Readiness Facilitator Certificate. She is fluent in Spanish and Italian.



**Steve Ordoñez**  
**Senior Employment & Training Assistant**  
**Broome-Tioga Workforce New York**  
**Southern Tier Region**

Steve Ordoñez is a Salvadoran-American, studying for his Human Services degree and working as a Senior Employment & Training Assistant for Broome County. He believes that employment in a positive and supportive environment is pivotal to improving the quality of one's life and works with clients from all different backgrounds to pursue their long term goals. A strong advocate for skills training, he is constantly seeking ways to better equip the population of Broome County and broaden their employment opportunities.