

Award puts volunteer in the spotlight

BY MICHELE HOWE
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Veronica Osorio started volunteering with the All Stars Project in Newark while she was in high school. Now, at the age of 21, the Montclair State University student has won national recognition for her work with the organization, which sponsors two youth development programs for city youngsters.

Last month, Osorio received a Daily Points of Light Award from the Points of Light Foundation for her community service work. The Points of Light Foundation was created by former President George H. W. Bush to encourage volunteerism across the nation.

A native of Newark, Osorio has devoted a lot of her spare time to the All Stars Project since she first learned of it while she was a high school junior. The organization nominated her for the Points of Light Award.

"I was the official nominator and three others made the recommendations. The award is a national one that salutes a different volunteer on a daily basis," said Gloria Strickland, director, All Stars Project New Jersey.

"Veronica is just a great person — a decent, solid, hard-working young lady who is highly respected by her peers. That's saying a lot when you are not only respected by the adults but also by young girls and boys ranging in age from 8 to 20 or 21," she added.

Currently a junior at Montclair State majoring in political science, Osorio is taking part in the Semester at Sea study abroad program. She answered questions from The Star-Ledger via e-mail while on her way to Chennai, India, onboard the MV Explorer.

"The Semester at Sea program is from the University of Pittsburgh, and basically it's a floating campus with professors, students, and staff from all across the United States and many other countries as well. Currently, there are 675 students from 200 plus schools. We visit 10 different countries on a hundred-day voyage," Osorio explained. She is due back on April 28.

"I first heard of the All Stars Project while I was a junior in high school. Gloria Strickland came to speak at my school and

spoke to my business class about the Development School for Youth and the internship that would follow. I was eager to sign up," Osorio said.

The Development School for Youth is the All Stars' leadership training and career education program for ages 16-21. The All Stars Project also sponsors the All Stars Talent Show Network, in which 1,000 young people, ages 5-25, produce and perform in talent shows and workshops.

In the spring of 2001, during her senior

son or a cool adult, and the youth involved in the program really appreciate the adults who help them, so they work hard all year to honor those who have helped and inspired them," Strickland said.

"My friends always ask me why I volunteer and dedicate so much time to this organization, but I do it not out of obligation, but because I've found an organization that is for the best interests of the people of the inner city and is actively striving towards it with everything they do," Osorio said.

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RICHARD KRAUSS

Veronica Osorio, right, at the All Stars Project's Phat Friend Awards in October 2003. Also shown, from left: Gloria Strickland, director of the All Stars Project; Rob Barber of Merrill Lynch, and Bridget Barber.

year in high school, Osorio began attending workshops through the Development School for Youth. Afterwards, she was granted an internship with Morgan Stanley Dean Witter in Brooklyn.

"My volunteer jobs have been eclectic to say the least. I started doing minimal tasks in the office, such as filing, but then Gloria started asking me to do talent show work," Osorio said.

She began by helping to support and build many aspects of the program's work in Newark — as a special events youth host; a volunteer with the All Stars Talent Show Network's youth anti-violence program, and as a member of the All Stars' Phat Friend Awards Committee. The Phat Friend Awards are presented annually by All Stars youth to adults who have demonstrated support for their concerns.

"The term 'Phat' was coined a few years ago to signify someone who was a cool per-

Her desire to help others led her to additional volunteer opportunities both within and outside of the All Stars Project. She has helped to organize the National Hip-Hop Political Convention last year in Newark and has served as an advocate for the Essex County Rape Crisis Call Center.

Osorio is not currently involved in any volunteer work, but plans to resume volunteering when she returns home.

"When I get back to New Jersey I plan to attend a week-long women's leadership training at Rutgers-New Brunswick. When I graduate I hope to travel some more — maybe throughout Europe or South America. I've also been asked to work on the local campaigns coming up, so that's an option for me," she said. "I do plan on attending graduate school but I'm not completely sure what I would like to pursue, so until I'm sure, I want to explore different avenues."