

Lottery Winners Demand Board Diversity as They Share Wealth

ALCARIO CASTELLANO thought his eyes were playing tricks on him one summer morning 15 years ago when the numbers listed in the newspaper indicated he and his wife had won a \$141 million lottery jackpot. Maybe it was a dream. He decided to go for a walk around the block to clear his head and then take another look.

“This is kind of insane that I did this, but I just had to be sure, so when I came back I looked at the tickets and the newspaper again,” says Mr. Castellano. “The numbers were still there.”

He woke his wife, Carmen, and asked her to double check. She confirmed it; the Castellanos were instant multimillionaires.

All of those zeros were hard to fathom for the couple, who had never known great wealth. When they hit the jackpot, Ms. Castellano was working as a college secretary, and her husband had retired as a grocery-store clerk 12 years earlier.

Still, they quickly sprang into action. Ms. Castellano sat down and wrote a long list of San Jose-area nonprofits.

“We had been longtime community activists and volunteers and giving at a dollar level we could,” she says. “So we knew right off we were going to share it with these groups we had already been involved with.”

More Big Winners

History repeated itself last month, when another California couple, Marvin and Mae Acosta, stepped forward to claim \$529 million in Powerball winnings. Like the Castellanos, the Acostas said they would make philanthropy a priority.

The Acostas have given no specifics yet about their plans for the money. However, the Castellanos recently spoke at length with *The Chronicle* about their journey from working-class family to millionaire philanthropists.

The Castellanos did more than shower money on a few favored causes; they did their homework, vetting organizations carefully from top to bottom. In particular, they took a hard look at the boardrooms of their local charities, and sometimes they didn't like what they saw.

The couple took their winnings in a lump sum of \$70.5 million, ending up with \$41.5 million after taxes. They promptly paid off the



CASTELLANO FAMILY FOUNDATION

JACKPOT FOR CHARITY
Alcario and Carmen Castellano have showered cash on dozens of groups.

college loans of their three grown children and helped extended family. They also started the Castellano Family Foundation to support Latinos. They focused on education, arts and culture, and leadership and diversity.

They have put \$5.5 million into the foundation and have so far given away more than \$4.6 million to about 170 nonprofits. They support at least 50 organizations annually.

The Castellanos say the early years they spent working with local Latino-focused charities made them realize how few Latinos served on nonprofit boards. When they started their foundation, they set out to change that and made sure board diversity informed their grant-making choices.

Today, they will not support a charity that does not have a racially diverse board, and they push for more Latino representation on the

boards of nonprofits that seek to help that population.

“If 99 percent of the community they're serving is Latino, we expect a majority of Latino representation on the board,” says Ms. Castellano. “The rationale is because of the cultural competency that comes with having someone from the community able to voice, with a basis of knowledge, what the needs are in that particular community.”

Pushing Diversity

The couple speak publicly on the topic when attending philanthropy conferences, and in one-on-one conversations with nonprofit leaders.

“Some of the organizations that we've pointed this out to, guess what?” says Mr. Castellano. “They would come back and say, ‘Oh, we have diversity on our boards now.’”

This pleases the couple, and they

Tips for Giving New Riches

When Carmen and Alcario Castellano won the lottery in 2001, they started a foundation to support Latino nonprofits. Here's what they have learned about foundations and philanthropy:

- Don't start a foundation without having had some involvement in the causes you want to support. It's best if you already know key players and understand major needs.
- Carefully research each organization you are thinking of backing. Assess whether a nonprofit has smart leadership and a strong and supportive board that is knowledgeable about the mission.
- When grantees submit a report at the end of a funding cycle, ask for detailed information about how the money helped them carry out their mission so you can decide whether to continue your support.
- Not all outcomes are measurable. If a grantee cannot provide hard data in its report at the end of a grant cycle, visit the places it carries out its services so you can hear from the beneficiaries.

will sometimes reconsider funding a charity they had previously turned down.

The Castellanos also spend a lot of time researching a charity and attending events before they award a grant. They visit a nonprofit's offices and the places where it carries out services so they can hear from the beneficiaries.

“Being at the site where they do the work and talking to parents or students really gives you a tremendous sense of whether that's something we want to support or not,” says Ms. Castellano.

Getting to know staff is part of

their process, too, and they say it's those conversations — hearing personal anecdotes and success stories — that over time help them gain confidence in a nonprofit's work.

Charitable Roots

The couple's emphasis on helping Latinos is a natural outgrowth of their own heritage — each has a parent born in Mexico — and their early charitable experiences.

Both grew up in California's Central Coast region but in different financial circumstances.

Mr. Castellano says his family was poor, and their struggles grew worse when his parents divorced in 1948, when he was 13. While his mother took in needy relatives, he worked throughout high school and after to help her raise their own family.

Ms. Castellano's father owned a trucking business and would sometimes bring home families that hadn't eaten in a few days or were struggling to find shelter. Her

mother would cook for them, and her father would try to find a place for them to live.

"They had really generous hearts for the downtrodden," says Ms. Castellano. "We didn't talk about it, but I learned by example."

She got hooked on volunteering with charities in early adulthood and worked as a secretary at San Jose City College for 37 years before retiring in 2001 to run the foundation.

Mr. Castellano's path included joining the Army after high school and working as a pyrotechnics technician in the aerospace industry in the 1960s before taking a job at Safeway, from which he retired in 1989.

Even in the early days of their marriage, long before winning the lottery, the Castellanos served on local nonprofit boards, got involved in advocacy work, and volunteered in other ways to help local Latinos.

Their children — Carmela, Armando, and Maria — attended predominantly white schools with

mostly white teachers. "The diversity of teachers was not there, and Carmen and I played a role in trying to get diversified teachers in the district," says Mr. Castellano. "So the children were aware of that. We didn't talk too much about it, but they knew what was going on."

Pondering a Legacy

The children learned about advocacy and charity and today play their own roles in both. They all serve on nonprofit boards and advocate for Latino arts and culture. They have also taken a more direct role in the foundation recently as their parents step away from day-to-day operations, although Ms. Castellano, 77, still serves as the foundation's vice president and Mr. Castellano, 82, helps a number of charities raise money from other donors.

Carmela Castellano-Garcia, a Yale Law School graduate who leads a nonprofit health-care organization, is now president of the

foundation. Her siblings serve on its board.

Mr. and Ms. Castellano say they plan to spend down the foundation's assets by 2026 unless their children want to contribute to keep it running. "The most important thing Carmen and I did was we worked hard together to accomplish what we have, even before we won," says Mr. Castellano. "And, hey, I'm very proud of that."

They say their lottery luck gave them a chance to help their families and their community in ways they never imagined. As they look back at their nonprofit work, their hope is that their giving and advocacy will influence other wealthy Latinos.

"Latinos are very generous. They give to their churches, their friends, their families, and neighbors, but in terms of giving through a formal foundation, it's new to them," says Ms. Castellano. "We want Latinos who can afford to give to consider doing it in a formal way and being very present." — MARIA DI MENTO

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