

Stories That Inspire: The Castellano Family's Philanthropic Journey

In 2001, six months after they won \$53 million in the California State lottery, San Jose residents Alcario and Carmen Castellano created the Castellano Family Foundation — one of the few Latino family foundations in the country — to promote Latino arts, culture, and leadership. A working class couple until their windfall, the Castellanos are "the founders, the financial backers, the directors, the personnel" of the organization, says Carmen Castellano. "We decide everything, usually in the kitchen."

Following Northern California Grantmaker's tradition of sharing *Stories That Inspire* about local family philanthropists, we are pleased to honor the Castellano family. Please join us for this special evening as the Castellanos will share how winning the lottery has changed (and has not changed) their family, how their philanthropic journey began, and how they are involving their family.

The Castellano Family's Inspiring Story of Philanthropy

Tuesday, September 27th, 2011



Carmen and Alcario Castellano

Last week NCG's [Family Philanthropy Exchange \(FPE\)](#) brought members together for an intimate conversation with **Carmen Castellano** of the Castellano Family Foundation, one of the few Latino family foundations in the country.

Carmen's talk was filled with inspiring stories about her family and community: both her parents were successful entrepreneurs; how her multicultural neighborhood shaped her view of community; and how even before her husband bought a winning California Lotto ticket in 2001 they were deeply committed to community life in San Jose.

Making A List

Carmen's husband Alcario couldn't believe it at first when he compared his Lotto ticket to the winning numbers printed in the newspaper. When he finally awoke his wife to confirm that he wasn't dreaming, that they had indeed won the largest single payout in the history of the state, Carmen recalls immediately finding a pad of paper and a pen: her first impulse was to write a list of all the organizations they were going to give money to.

There was never any doubt in their minds that they wouldn't give money to their community and six months after winning the Lotto, the family established the Castellano Family Foundation to support Latino arts, culture and leadership.

A Family Affair

Before the foundation was officially established, all of their children returned home for a family meeting of the minds. Carmen, Alcario and their children all came to an agreement on the foundation's mission and purpose.

Even though the entire family came to a consensus about the foundation's establishment, Carmen and Alcario, as the foundation's only trustees, have had sole responsibility for making the organization's grantmaking decisions. Now the family is planning to map out a transition that will bring their children into the foundation's work and decision making process.

A Call For More Diversity

Carmen told us that she and her husband are often the only Latinos in the room when they go to conferences for family foundations. They don't mind that often they find themselves taking up the cause to raise awareness about diversity in philanthropy and the need to support communities of color.

In researching the philanthropic field, Carmen began to feel that not enough philanthropic dollars were being allocated to communities of color. The Castellano Family Foundation's focus on Latino arts, culture and leadership is an intentional move to address that deficit.

The foundation's commitment to supporting diversity doesn't stop at their grantmaking focus. Carmen explained they also encourage the nonprofits they support to diversify their boards and staff so that they have the cultural competency to work with the diverse communities they serve. She encouraged us all that night to consider using this type of approach to help increase diversity in the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors.

An Intimate Exchange

The evening ended with a Q&A session facilitated by FPE Co-Chair **Lisa Parker** of The Lawrence Welk Family Foundation and a reception that allowed attendees and NCG staff to connect with one another and with Carmen over hors d'oeuvres.

Connecting members with one another and providing a space for family grantmakers to explore themes that affect their practice is at the heart of NCG's work with the Family Philanthropy Exchange. The *Stories That Inspire* series is just one of the ways NCG brings family grantmakers together. Learn more about NCG's Family Philanthropy Exchange [online](#).