

The following article ran in The Springfield Republican and on MassLive.com on October 15, 2008.

Zoraida Rodriguez: Building a Healthy Community

A 1999 graduate of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Zoraida Rodriguez is not one to stand still. Her goal was to become a registered dietician and help the large, under-served Latino community, especially with regard to the growing “epidemic” of obesity and diabetes. Since obtaining her BS in Nutrition from the university, she has continued to set and achieve ever-higher goals.

Zoraida came to the university as a Nutrition major through SUMMA, a preparatory program that linked Springfield public schools with the university. This program was sponsored by the Bilingual Collegiate Program, which provided academic support. Here she took advantage of tutorial resources, particularly with regard to chemistry and biology. “I also was impressed with how approachable and helpful the advisors and professors were, in giving individualized assistance,” she said.

Feeling a little lost on the UMass Amherst campus, she wanted to join an organization that would help her to meet more people and develop a network of friends. She joined AHORA, a student Latino organization, which provided this opportunity... and then co-founded Boricuas Unidos, an organization for Puerto Rican students. She said this was valuable experience, as she learned how to write a constitution, procedures and bylaws for an organization – skills she’s using now. In addition, Zoraida volunteered with UMNA, the UMass Amherst Nutrition Association, which promotes nutrition at the university via health fairs and recruits new students to the nutrition program. “Through UMNA, I went to area high schools to encourage students to apply to the university and major in Nutrition,” she said.

Zoraida’s career after graduation began with the Women, Infants and Children program (WIC), a state and federal organization providing family nutrition counseling, as well as vouchers for healthy food. After 3 years with WIC, she was accepted to a one-year internship program which led to her present status as a registered Dietician. She then worked for Caring Health Center in Springfield, which provides free care for the uninsured in the community. But Zoraida was hardly sitting still, now that she’d met her original goals! “I had developed higher expectations”, she said. “I wanted to start a private practice.”

Zoraida is now at Bay State Hospital, working in the endocrinology department. And true to her newest goals, she co-founded the Diabetes Center of Western Massachusetts, located in Holyoke, in her “spare” time. It is open one day each week and staffed by herself (a registered dietician), a registered nurse – who is a diabetes educator, and a pharmacist. As they acquire more funding, they hope to be open more days per week to service the community.

Looking back at her UMass Amherst roots, Zoraida said, “My years at the university enabled me to acquire needed skills, achieve my goals and give back to my community. I like making a difference!”



Zoraida Rodriguez

Prepared by the UMass Amherst Alumni Association. For more information go to UMassAlumni.com.