

Local residents up for awards

Austin Under 40 honors young professionals for service

BY ASHLEY CLARY

Today some Oak Hill residents and workers may join the ranks of Lance Armstrong, Mayor Will Wynn and Michael Dell.

Tonight at the Austin Music Hall at 6 p.m., Austinites are gathering to honor some of our town's best and brightest at the Austin Under 40 Awards (Au40). The Au40 was started to recognize men and women who have achieved great success in their chosen careers as well as demonstrated outstanding community service. Five of the 50

finalists either live or work in the Oak Hill area. They are Gerardo Interiano, Natalie Kennedy, Jeff McAdams, Eric Cunningham, and Eva Maria Garza.

Gerardo Interiano, District Director of the 21st Congressional District, is nominated in the Government/Public Affairs category. Hired by Congressman Lamar Smith as his 2006 Campaign Manager and later promoted, he oversees the operations of Austin, San Antonio and much of the Hill Country.

"It was quite a surprise when I found out that my wife wanted to nominate me," Interiano said. "It is an extremely humbling experience to be nominated, but even more so when it's done by someone whom you respect and love; especially when you realize who you have been nominated with, as well as past nominees."

In addition to his political work, Interiano is President of the Parish Council at St. Mary's Cathedral and Treasurer of the Children's Medical Foundation Uptown Circle of Friends, which is a fundraising arm for the Dell Children's Hospital. He also served as a member of the AISD Young Men's Leadership Academy Task Force.



Gerardo Interiano

When asked about his future goals, Interiano told the Gazette: "At this point in time, I'm focusing on my current responsibilities, not the least of which is passing the Bar Exam. Aside from that, I'm extremely happy where I am in my position with Congressman Smith. He is certainly quite an inspiration and someone that has shaped my goals in my many ways. Someone once told me: 'If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.' So as for politics, I figure I'll leave the future to take care of itself. Austin is a city that I love and I hope to be able to raise a family here one day."

Natalie Kennedy, another nominee in the Business/Entrepreneurship category, is owner and CEO of Kennedy Creative, a destination management company.

"I have always had a passion for events. My love of the industry began 13 years ago when I was producing events in a marketing role for an advertising agency," Kennedy said. "I learned a lot along the way...[and the] thought of taking all of that knowledge and starting a company on my own just seemed like a natural next step."

Kennedy Creative has planned events for Microsoft, Mercedes Benz, Texas Parks & Wildlife Foundation and the Dell Corporation.

"I think Kennedy Creative stands apart from other destination management companies because of the group of well-trained professionals we have on our team," Kennedy said.

"When it comes to creating an event, we ask as many questions we can to uncover the client's objective before we theme it out. We want to be able to paint the full picture of the event in our mind so we can bring that picture to life. Along with experience and know-how, we just love what we do. We all have a pas-

sion for the industry and it shows in our work.

"When I received the phone call from an AU40 rep telling me I was a finalist, my initial reaction was a mix of excitement and surprise. My team was thrilled. They know I always love a reason to celebrate!"

Jeff McAdams, founder of HigherOut, a recruiting and consulting firm, was nominated in the Technology and Services category of Au40.

"This is very meaningful to me, both personally and professionally," McAdams said. "At HigherOut, we've always taken pride in our personal consultative approach because we fully believe it is exactly what this industry needs. I'm honored to be recognized among this distinguished list of finalists."

Both Eric Cunningham and Eva Maria Garza were nominated in the Youth/Education category. Cunningham teaches English to freshmen and coaches at Bowie High School and Garza is a Program Facilitator at Austin High School.

"One of my English and coaching colleagues nominated me. I was shocked at first not believing my contributions were up with the many active people in Austin," Cunningham said. "Personally, I don't feel as I have put in any more time or energy than any other hard-working English teacher, but having my ninth grade team want me to mentor them as a ninth grade team leader was enough recognition for me."

The event, hosted by the Young Women's Alliance and the Young Men's Business league, will begin tonight at 6 p.m. with a VIP Reception honoring the Au40 sponsors and finalists (invitation required). The evening will include cocktail hour, dinner, a silent auction and the awards presentation. All proceeds from ticket sales will go to the Austin Sunshine Camps and Young Women's Alliance Foundation. Because of last year's attendees and sponsors, Au40 raised over \$20,000 for these causes. For more information contact info@austinunder40.org or visit the event's website at <http://www.austinunder40.org>.



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