

Hard work pays off for newly minted grad

Amalia Mejia, a native of the Dominican Republic receives a degree from MCC with hard work and determination.

By **JESSICA SPIES**

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On June 5th, Amalia Mejia was presented with one of the most important honors that she has received in the United States: a degree from Monroe Community College.

Mejia, originally from the Dominican Republic, has had to overcome numerous barriers in her quest to earn an associate's degree in health information technology.

"The most difficult thing was the language," Mejia said. "Even though I was educated, I couldn't do anything."

She attended MCC because she wasn't able to find a rewarding career.

"I got involved with the program because I was starting to look for a future career," Mejia said. "It was giving me a chance to support my family."

In 2003, Mejia was awarded a scholarship from the Latina Unidas Women's Scholarship Fund. The fund recognizes adult Latina women who are attending higher education but do not receive funding from traditional sources. Mejia was



Amalia Mejia

one of the first to receive this scholarship.

Along with classes, Mejia also held a part-time job and had her hands full with her young children.

"I couldn't waste my time," she said. She had to prioritize and often had to turn down plans with friends or outings to the movies.

It was a stressful two years, but Mejia says she had a great experience at MCC and was challenged daily. She attributes part of her success to her

professors. Lori Laco-Schiano, assistant professor of health information technology at MCC, teaches courses in the program and worked with Amalia. She noticed Amalia's shyness right away.

"She wouldn't even speak in the beginning because she was so worried," Laco-Schiano said. "But she worked very hard for her success and would help the other students. Watching her and her persistence and determination helped to make her more suc-

cessful. She was more successful than some of the English speaking students."

Mejia and her family moved to New York City in 1994 but after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, relocated to Rochester.

"After September 11th, it was scary living there and we didn't know what would happen there," Mejia said. "We found [Rochester] a good place to live and there was opportunity that my kids have to develop their music talents."

Her oldest child is in the Greece marching band and her younger one is learning to play the violin.

Mejia started work June 1 at Rochester's Anthony Jordan Health Center as a medical records correspondence technician and interpreter.

Like her collegiate work, she finds her job to be a challenge every day. Mejia is excited to serve Spanish people and feels blessed to have supportive co-workers. In the future, she will work to earn a bachelor's degree to get farther in her field. With this education, Mejia hopes to better the Spanish community as well as the community as a whole.

"I've been given the opportunity and I just took it," Mejia said.

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