

Lowell's Rivera is Professional of Year for national Boys & Girls Clubs

By Aaron Curtis, acurtis@lowellsun.com

UPDATED: 05/09/2018 03:18:26 PM EDT



JuanCarlos Rivera, center, director of operations with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell, was recognized nationally by the Boys & Girls Club of America out of field of 60,000 administrators for completing a number of projects and fundraisers. Surrounding him are club members and employees: From the back: Iyana Lopez, Damian Negron, Kaffy Reyes, Cameron Senechame, Samarak Sisowath, Adam Naiaye, Ajadus Rosa, Destiny Rosa, Stephine Ekume, Zariah Rivera. Miangelise Monet, Damian Montanez, Melissa Delgado, Johanna Montanez, Jayden Chhun, Mariah Daniels, Diani Kameraz, and Destiny Vangpa. SUN/Scot Langdon

LOWELL -- When JuanCarlos Rivera became a member of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell at 9 years old, he recalled looking up at mentors and thinking, "That's what I want to be."

Rivera -- now the club's director of operations 30 years later -- recalled that memory while accepting an award proving his accomplishments go beyond his childhood goal.

Last week, Rivera was flown to San Diego where he was named Professional of the Year by the Professional Association of the Boys & Girls Club of America. He was chosen from 60,000 club professionals nationwide.

The award follows Rivera receiving the Professional of the Year honor for the Northeast Region last November.

"Everything that I've done is related to our team," he said in an interview in his office Monday. "Everybody in our team has come together, and I've been very fortunate to work with some very creative people."

Rivera, who has been a youth worker for roughly 24 years, started his career as a youth outreach worker at the club from 1997 to 2000. He rejoined the club in 2013 as director of operations.

"JuanCarlos is inspirational," said the local club's Executive Director Joe Hungler. "He's done an amazing job building our team and building our partners. Through a lot of his efforts, we've had a lot of growth."

According to Hungler, who nominated Rivera for the award, under Rivera's leadership, daily attendance at the club has grown 28 percent and frequency of attendance has grown 68 percent.

Partnerships and volunteerism has increased from 280 volunteers annually to more than 1,300.

Hungler called Rivera instrumental in transforming underutilized spaces at the club that now house the Music Clubhouse, Makerspace and exercise room. He also played a roll in the expansion of the Teen Center, which includes the Teen Robotics Room, and a career and college readiness space.

"One of the things I love about the Boys & Girls Club is that our philosophy always focuses on what the young people want," Rivera said.



JuanCarlos Rivera plays foosball Monday with club members Michael Jewell, left, Joshua Araujo, top right, and Zariah Boateng, right. SUN/Scot Langdon

"Rather than having adults come in and say, 'This is what I think young people need,' a lot of it is having conversations and going through the journey side-by-side with young people saying, 'This is your home ... what do you want to see?'"

Aside from youth work at the club, a 19-year-old Rivera and others his age worked to develop UTEC Lowell in 1999. The youth center was developed in response to gang violence rampant in the Mill City at the time. The organization focuses on area youth coming out of incarceration.

When needed, UTEC and other area youth organizations work with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell, according to Rivera.

"The combination of the values I gained from my family and from what I've gained here at the club definitely impacted how my life turned out," he said. "And it's for the better. Throughout my childhood and my career, I always had people around me who encouraged me to continue doing the work I was passionate about doing."

Rivera's award comes the same week the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell was named Nonprofit of the Year during Enterprise Bank's 2018 Celebration of Excellence.

Hungler said Rivera is a significant reason the club earned the distinction.

"He takes ownership and pride in what he does," Hungler said. "It touches each part of the organization, whether it's direct programs, or facilities, or community partnerships ... he does a little bit of everything."