

## On a Path to Making a Difference

Kevin Moore | Posted: Monday, February 19, 2018 12:33 pm



*Editor's Note: The Rotary Club of Homestead established an Interact Club at MAST Academy a few years ago. Interact is the youngest branch of Rotary designed to help guide high school age students preparing for a future that includes giving back to their communities. Rotaract is geared for college age students as they too prepare to learn what Service Above Self truly means. Miami Dade College professor Kevin Moore has chosen to spearhead this latest effort.*

A group of young adults is heeding Mayor Jeff Porter's call to engagement and has collectively decided to become involved in the community and make a difference in the lives of people who live here.

After weeks of meetings and bonding over service activities, 25 people attended an historic meeting at Homestead City Hall. There, they voted to form Rotaract of Homestead, a Rotary International-sponsored organization that provides a vehicle for young adults to engage in community service and develop professional and social skills that will serve them in life. Rotaract becomes Homestead's first community-based service club and networking organization established by and for young adults (18-35).

The Charter Members elected Mayra Padilla as The Club's first President. Padilla, a Family Worker with Le Jardin Community Centers in Homestead. Padilla, 29, who grew up in Homestead and graduated from Homestead Senior High School and Miami Dade College Homestead Campus, was the driving force behind organizing the group. She has served low income children and families in the area for the past 10 years as an Early Education Teacher and Family Worker. She has seen the needs, big and small, from up close.

"I recently met a young mother who was desperate to go to work," Padilla said. "She had an opportunity, but due to transportation issues wasn't able to take it. That job could have set her life in a whole new direction."

Padilla said this young lady was asking for assistance to get a bus pass, but didn't qualify for the programs that provide this service.

"Less than \$60 could have changed this family's life," Padilla added. "I see this all the time. Padilla heard of the Rotary Club's College Scholarships and wondered if it would be possible to do something similar for members of our community who aren't necessarily going to college. She met with leaders of the Rotary Club and learned of its goals and activities, as well as Rotaract, its arm for young adults. She was especially impressed by the club's motto, "Service Above Self."

"We can do this," she said. "I spoke with some friends and realized a lot of people my age have a passion to help people in need, they just don't know where to start. Rotaract can become that place, and we can become a resource for the Social Service community for volunteers and eventually these sort-of 'mini scholarships' to help pay for low cost items that could have a huge impact in a person's life."

In addition to Padilla, the club's Charter Board of Directors are Vice President Julie Fontaine (27) a graduate of MDC Homestead and The University of Florida, who is now a Nurse in Miami; Treasurer Analleli Gallegos (29) an FIU Finance major, who also graduated from MDC Homestead; and Secretary Maribel Corona (20), a current MDC Homestead student who plans to pursue the college's Bachelors in Business Management and Supervision.

"We are real excited by the support we've received from everyone, especially from Mayor Porter," said Padilla. "To hold our organizing meetings in City Hall has really raised our expectations of ourselves and confirms that what we're trying to do is valued by our leaders."

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